



**METROPOLITAN  
FICTION  
RESERVE**



REF 475

## WOOLWICH CENTRAL

The card in this pocket must **NOT**  
be removed.

If this book is not returned to the library  
on or before the last date shown on the  
card above a fine will be charged in  
accordance with the Libraries' Regulations.  
Please quote the number and the last date  
stamped on the card if you wish to renew  
the book by post or telephone.

MON.—FRI. ... 9 a.m.—8 p.m.


SAT. ... 9 a.m.—5 p.m.

## WOOLWICH LIBRARIES









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2022 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation

THE INHERITANCE



*Books by*  
**F. E. MILLS YOUNG**

---

THE ROMANTIC TRAGEDY  
THE WHITE LOCUST  
THE BROKEN SILENCE  
AILSA  
THE FUTURE  
THE JEALOUS KEYS  
ATONEMENT  
MYLES CALTHORPE, I.D.B.  
THE PURPLE MISTS  
VALLEY OF A THOUSAND HILLS  
THE BIGAMIST  
THE SHADOW OF THE PAST  
THE PACE OF THE OX  
THE ALMONDS OF LIFE  
DAWN AT SUNDAY'S RIVER  
SELWYN BROTHERS  
THE LONG PATH  
THE WINE FARM



# THE INHERITANCE

BY  
F. E. MILLS YOUNG

WOOLWICH  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARIES.



Geoffrey Bles

Suffolk St., Pall Mall

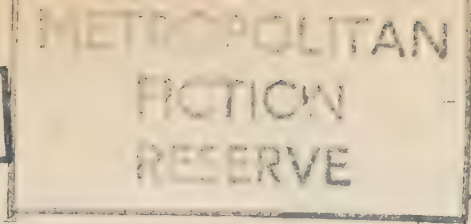
London

Y41 L

*First published . . . . May 1928*







475

## I

MR. ALAN CHAFFERY threw his copy of the *Daily Mail* into a corner seat of the compartment he proposed occupying, and elbowed his way to the refreshment buffet in quest of something strong enough to disinfect his throat from the dust stirred up by the immense crowd entraining for Newbury.

Everything promised well for an enjoyable day. He had not booked a seat in the train; nevertheless, through his early arrival on the platform, he had secured a corner seat, probably the only vacant corner seat in the train. He congratulated himself doubly on this stroke of luck, which owed nothing to foresight and everything to punctuality; it paid to be in good time for everything, whether business or pleasure.

So, having deputed his copy of the *Daily Mail* to proclaim possession of his seat, he turned his back on further responsibility in this respect and sought enjoyment elsewhere. When, after an interval, he returned to his compartment, it was to discover his copy of the *Daily Mail* on the floor of the carriage, and a big blonde young man in occupation of his seat.

"Excuse me," Mr. Chaffery observed somewhat frigidly, "you are in my seat."

"Impossible!" the young man returned with



blank audacity. "I am in occupation of a seat belonging to the railway company for which I have paid the necessary rental."

"Sir, this is outrageous," said Mr. Chaffery, and became aware that the other occupants of the compartment, which was full, were betraying a lively interest in the duologue. "You possibly think you are funny. But this is a violation of all the rules of travel. I placed my *Daily Mail* on the seat which I had engaged as first-come, and left it for a few minutes only, confident that such claim to ownership, recognized by all reasonable persons, would receive consideration."

The blonde young man apparently was not reasonable. He smiled broadly.

"I've known that dodge tried before," he said rudely. "There was nothing to indicate ownership of this corner when I appropriated it. The copy of the *Daily Mail* was lying where it is now, on the floor. You can't come that over me."

Mr. Chaffery attempted to annihilate this vulgar young man with a stare; but the young man continued to smile, and to remain in occupation of a seat which, to do him bare justice, he had believed to be unappropriated when he availed himself of it. Every other corner seat in the carriage was booked; and the *Daily Mail*, which Mr. Chaffery had thrown carelessly, had fallen short, and lay where it now reposed, fulfilling no obligation other than self-advertisement. Mr. Chaffery was too incensed to pick it up.

"You are insufferable," he said to the interloper,

and scowled, not only upon him but on the company generally, most of whom were young men, and many of whom were smiling. "The lack of manners in the present generation is deplorable."

The train was packed from foremost to rear coach, as was only to be expected in view of its being a race train; it looked likely that Mr. Chaffery would be compelled to stand in the corridor. Many people were doing so; but Mr. Chaffery felt that he had a right to a seat. To stand in the corridor, having paid for sitting accommodation, would have been annoying in any event, in the present instance, conscious of ill usage in the matter of the seat he had bespoken, it was more than an annoyance; Mr. Chaffery felt it to be a personal injury amounting even to insult. He glared upon the offensive intruder, who appeared wholly unmoved by his wrath, seeming indeed to find the incident rather amusing than otherwise. He made no show of making way for the older man. A young man seated opposite, however, rose and quietly placed his seat at Mr. Chaffery's disposal.

"I rather like standing," he said pleasantly. "I am only sorry you should make such sweeping allegations against present-day manners. There are ill-mannered and well-mannered persons belonging to every age."

Mr. Chaffery scrutinized the speaker attentively.

"Thank you, sir. I accept your rebuke with your seat. Your defence of your generation was well spoken." He sat down heavily. "I do not like standing; moreover it is not good for me. Your face



somehow appears to me familiar. Haven't I met you somewhere?"

The young man smiled.

"You probably have, Mr. Chaffery, more than once. My name is Renshaw, though very likely that conveys nothing to you. I am better acquainted with your daughter."

"My daughter. . . . Um! . . . Ah! . . . Yes."

Mr. Chaffery stooped for his copy of the *Daily Mail*, and from behind the shelter of its sheets remained, a monument of unapproachable reserve, as securely secluded behind this crackling barrier as he was wont to sit secluded and shut off from the world in the inner labyrinth of his offices in the City. No one dared intrude upon him there; no one would have dreamed of intruding now upon his privacy behind his more flimsy entrenchment. He shut down the news-sheet between himself and the other occupants of the carriage as one might lower a blind deliberately within a room in the faces of those without.

The man, Renshaw, accepted this, as he would have accepted any other eccentricity from this particular man, regarding it as part of his peculiarity. The blonde young man, whose name was Nigel Hennelly, first flushed a deep pink, a frequent characteristic of blonde people when moved by emotion, and then snatched at a newspaper which lay across his knees and held it as a screen between him and his worsted antagonist. Was he the worsted antagonist? Hennelly felt more than doubtful of the quality of his own victory.

So that was Chaffery?—the big bug in the City, who

was a reputed multi-millionaire. What a damned fool he had been not to give up the seat to the cantankerous old blighter. Chaffery, the father of beautiful Iris Chaffery, of whom, since his first meeting with her, he had dreamed at nights. He had had visions of a pleasant development of the friendship into something warmer, closer. They knew the same people, and met often. But he had started on the wrong side of her father. That stick, Renshaw, was no fool; he seized his opportunities all right.

Hennelly felt quite unreasonably annoyed, in view of the fact that the responsibility for his act was entirely his own. He had missed a fine opportunity of presenting himself favourably in the eyes of Mr. Chaffery. In ordinary circumstances this would not have disturbed him greatly; but the circumstances were not ordinary; Chaffery was a millionaire. To annoy a millionaire whose daughter you admire is idiotic, especially when your finances are not in a flourishing condition.

He recalled having heard it said that Chaffery never forgot an injury, and that he had an awkward faculty for remembering faces; hence the reason for the newspaper screen which he held in front of him even more jealously than Chaffery held and crackled the copy of the *Daily Mail*. He did not propose to give the old boy another opportunity for taking stock of his features. But Chaffery, he remembered, had looked at him during their passage at arms with hostile intentness; he believed he had registered his features with a view to retaliation when the occasion presented

itself. It assuredly would present itself, as Hennelly realized.

The mischief was done now, however ; and Renshaw had profited by his folly and earned a good mark for being a good boy. The good mark brought its reward. Hennelly, before he hurried away to lose himself in the press on the platform when the train disgorged its crowds upon arrival at the race siding, heard Renshaw receive an invitation to lunch with the great man at the great man's club on a given date. That was a clear sign of preference.

It was significant of Mr. Chaffery's attitude towards all young men, more particularly towards those young men who claimed acquaintance with his daughter, that he invariably entertained them at his club. A man required to be married, or to be well advanced in middle life, before Mr. Chaffery invited him to his house, where his only daughter presided in beautiful boredom as hostess at her father's dull entertainments.

Iris Chaffery was one of the belles of a season which had launched several charming débutantes upon society ; she was possibly the most beautiful of them all. Her age at the time when Nigel Hennelly fouled his prospects with her father was twenty-one. Twenty-one, the only child of a millionaire, and, up to the present, heartwhole.

" You might have tipped me the wink," Hennelly observed to Renshaw, in whose company he was attending the races, " as to who the old boy was."

Renshaw received this with mild surprise.

" What difference would that have made had it



been possible even for me to convey the information ? ” he inquired. “ If you wouldn’t vacate your seat for an unknown and much older man who claimed it, why should you act with greater consideration towards Chaffery ? ”

“ Oh ! well, he’s Chaffery, of course.”

“ What’s that got to do with it ? ”

“ He happens to be the father of Iris Chaffery, and that makes a lot of difference.”

“ I see.”

Renshaw took a long steady look at his companion before deliberately changing the subject.

The day, which had begun badly for Hennelly, continued badly. He lost heavily, which did not tend to lighten his spirits. Viewed all round the day was a failure. Money was tight enough already. His luck was out.

By contrast, and in accord with a curious law which decrees that unto him that hath much shall be given, Mr. Chaffery proved fortunate in his backing and added a fair sum, which he did not want, to swell his inflated balance. On the whole he was pleased with his day, which, with the exception of the annoyance at starting, had passed very agreeably. A man, even when he does not need the stakes, knows the joy of satisfaction in spotting a winner.

He returned home in high good humour, changed, and went downstairs to join his daughter, who, dressed for a dance she was attending that night, waited for him in the drawing-room. He gave her an account of the day’s doings, not omitting mention of the un-

pleasant incident in the railway carriage. She listened with no great show of sympathy.

"You should go in the car," she said, "and then you wouldn't be subject to these annoyances."

"I've always gone to Newbury by train ever since I started going," he answered, in the deliberate tones of a man who is too obstinately conservative in his habits to adapt himself to the changing conditions of his time. "I always shall go to Newbury by train."

"Well, at least book your seat in advance," she advised. "Why should you have to scramble for a place? It's absurd."

"There was no scramble," he returned. "I secured my seat, and was robbed of it by an impudent puppy. Young Renshaw very politely gave me his seat."

"Mark!" she said, and laughed. "He would."

"I did not know you were so intimately acquainted as to have arrived at using his Christian name," he said stiffly.

"Oh! I've met him a good many times at dances and places. Most people call him Mark. He is one of those kind, obliging men who get themselves liked generally."

Chaffery frowned. He did not care for the sound of this. He had a sort of instinctive antagonism towards all eligible young men; towards anyone singled out for special favour by Iris his antagonism was assertive.

"Superficial good manners, possibly," he said. "He was in the puppy's company."

"No; there is nothing superficial about Mark's

manners," she returned. "They are innate. And the puppy, whoever he may be, is more likely to benefit from Mark's influence than to exert an influence over Mark. He is a solid person."

"You appear to think extraordinarily highly of him," he observed with ready suspicion.

"Everyone does." She smiled brightly. "There's the gong. Let's go in. I have to be at the Farradys' at nine."

"You are always out," he complained.

"Oh, my dear parent! You really are altogether behind the times."

There was no doubt, Mr. Chaffery reflected, that the manners of the present generation were deteriorating.



## II

**I**RIS CHAFFERY, the spoilt beauty of her set, admired, sought after, indulged generally, suffered not unnaturally from an undue share of popularity which was inclined to harden and encourage selfishness in a nature combining many fine qualities with a few that were less worthy. There was more than a touch of her father's pig-headed obstinacy in her make-up ; the latent tenderness and capacity for strong and loyal affection inherited from her mother was less evident, but it shone clear and true at times. Self-willed, impulsive, defiant of authority, generous to a fault, a good friend, and charming companion, it was not surprising that, with the additional attractions of beauty and her father's immense wealth, she was a person of considerable importance among her associates.

Many men loved Iris Chaffery, or imagined they loved her ; but, perhaps because to be loved and wooed was no extraordinary event, she accepted homage and gave nothing in return. From the time she left the schoolroom she had listened to declarations of undying passion from men who had been more or less in earnest, but until she reached the age of twenty-one the tender emotion failed to touch her. She had always been a little hard and sexless. And then the

inevitable happened. She met Nigel Hennelly ; and the woman in her awoke.

Hennelly was the handsomest man of her acquaintance. He was a fair giant, six feet of well-proportioned manhood ; with a winning way which made his preference for Iris Chaffery a matter of regret to several girls, a good war record behind him, an injured right arm which incapacitated him from further service, but did not intrude itself upon the notice of the casual observer, and an army pension altogether inadequate to his needs even when supplemented by the small income left him by his parents. To the daughter of Alan Chaffery his entire fortune would have appeared absurdly small ; it would not have paid her dress accounts. Money was an unknown quantity with her ; she never considered it. It was always there, an inexhaustible supply. She could not have imagined any condition in which she was deprived of it. It was a part of the accepted order of her universe, like the electric light which responded to a button. One had only to sign a cheque, the Aladdin lamp of modern times, to command whatever money could buy.

Nigel did not appear to be poor. He went everywhere, knew most of the people she knew, did the same things. He was at the Farradys' dance, to which she also was invited. He was the first man to approach her when she made her appearance. Obviously he was on the watch for her, and, less sure of his welcome than he need have been, he elbowed his way towards her through the press about the doorway.

"The first bit of luck I've had to-day," he said,



when, having greeted one another, they compared programmes. "I was horribly afraid until I saw you that you weren't turning up."

"What's made you so mouldy?" she asked. "Been backing losers?"

"Yes. My usual luck."

"What does it matter?" she consoled him. "You will have forgotten by to-morrow."

"I've forgotten already," he returned, and smiled down at her gaily.

Her dark eyes lifted to his; and the man's bold eyes softened with a look of tender admiration as they met the shrouded mystery of those dusky eyes, black and splendid, no shade less jetty than her rippling hair.

"Do you never go to race meetings?" he inquired, in commonplace tones, to cover the trembling that had come upon him.

"Not often. They bore me. I think the effect they have on most people is devastating. You are depressed. Father to-night was elated. Usually he returns in a vile temper. That men's moods should respond to the paces of a horse seems idiotic, doesn't it?"

"Sounds so, put that way. My mood varies with the weight of my pocket; they are as nicely adjusted as a balance; when one is light the other is heavy."

"There's Mark!" She smiled at Renshaw, who came up at the moment and demanded to see her card.

"You are late," he said. "I've been watching for you. How many dances can you spare me?"

"One," she returned demurely.

"Only one!" His tone expressed disappointment. Her dark eyes flashed a laugh at him.

"One for yourself," she added, "and one for being rather nice to father."

Renshaw smiled as he scribbled his name on her card. So she had heard that story. It was lucky for Nigel, he reflected, that Chaffery had not been acquainted with his name.

"That's rather sweet of you," he said. "It proves the exception to the rule that virtue is its own reward. If I get one for being 'rather' nice to Mr. Chaffery, I take it that three for Nigel suggest that he has been 'very' nice?"

He glanced at Hennelly as he spoke. There was no malice, only a whimsical understanding in the look he gave him. Hennelly reddened and remained silent; the girl, laughing softly, made no direct reply.

"Tell me," she said when she received her card back from Renshaw, "who went with you to the races, Mark?"

The tone in which she asked the question expressed a merely casual interest; but to Hennelly, as to Renshaw, the question itself suggested that the incident of the railway carriage was known to her, and that she sought to establish the identity of the man who had gained Mr. Chaffery's ill will. Hennelly felt increasingly uncomfortable; not that he expected Renshaw to give him away; he knew very well that he would do nothing of the kind; but the evident curiosity of Iris Chaffery seemed to point to resent-

ment of rudeness shown to her father by someone as yet to her unknown. What an ass he had been not to give up the seat to the old blighter. The matter, trivial in itself, was assuming quite important dimensions. It seemed to rise up in his path and challenge his further progress.

He listened for Renshaw's reply. Good old Mark ! He had never been known to give anyone away.

" Oh ! there were several of us," Renshaw answered. " The usual crowd. Why weren't you there ? "

Just what Hennelly felt impatient to ask. Had she been there nothing of a disagreeable nature could have happened.

" I think I shall have to attend in future," she said, " in order to prevent the hooligans from annoying my one and only parent."

Someone came up at the moment and claimed her for the dance which was then commencing. Before separating from them she flashed upon Renshaw one of her sweetest and rarest smiles. It left Renshaw dazzled, like a man who has emerged from darkness upon blinding light ; it left Hennelly with the frost-bitten sense of being deliberately excluded from the warmth of a genial friendship. He felt savage.

" Patted on the back all round, aren't you ? " he said, and moved away in anything but an amiable frame of mind.

It was absurd that such a trivial thing should become so magnified. But the matter worried him so considerably that he resolved to get it off his chest. There was nothing much in it after all said and done ;

he had been quite within his right to retain his seat. But discourtesy to age, as discourtesy to a woman, is, however one seeks to justify the act, inexcusable.

Later, when he danced with Iris, he unburdened his mind to her. He started with the fear of losing her favour ; but her quick grasp of the situation, with a ready understanding of and sympathy with his embarrassment, heartened him wonderfully. She liked him all the better for his clumsy confession.

" I say," he began. " I'm afraid you've heard that rotten story of the dispute over a seat in the railway compartment this morning. I admit I was altogether in the wrong, even though there was nothing to indicate that the seat was engaged. Still, I should have vacated it ; and I didn't. I'm sorry about it now."

So was Iris, knowing how little likely her father was to forget it ; nevertheless, she sought to reassure him.

" Then it was you ? " she said. " I wondered. I had a funny little feeling that it might be."

" Why ? " he asked quickly. " Are my manners usually bad ? "

" Not to me," she replied. " But I suppose really the proof of good manners lies in acting with consideration without any inducement so to act. I wish it had been anyone else but father, because he is slow to overlook these trifles ; and I did wish him to meet you."

" Yes," he said. " That's what galls me. I wanted to meet him and create a good impression. That's not possible now."

Iris broke into a laugh.

"Oh, he isn't such a dragon as all that. Still, if he remembers you, it will be awkward. You had better give him time to forget the incident."

"That's a lengthy process with him, I gather. At least the tale in the clubs runs to that effect."

"I shouldn't place too much reliance on club gossip, if I were you," she said brightly. "We'll take a more optimistic and a kinder view. But if you should get a chance ever of doing him a service, take it."

"Rather! I'd risk my blessed neck for him, if that would help."

She looked up at him kindly.

"Don't think any more about it," she counselled. "These things blow over."

"You are adorable," he murmured. "I would risk anything, life itself, for your sake."

He felt triumphant. He hadn't lost ground after all. The warm flush in her cheeks, the warm light in her eyes, assured him he had nothing to fear so far as she was concerned. He might have made an enemy of her father, but with her on his side he could afford to leave to time the straightening of the tangle.

He dismissed the matter straightway from his thoughts, and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the hour, and to the business of making love passionately with every opportunity which offered. Iris did not take him altogether seriously; but she liked to hear him avow an undying passion, which he was bold enough to declare, although his temerity did not push him to the verge of risking a proposal. It was



sufficient for the present to acquaint her with his feeling for her, and leave her with the impression that the knowledge of his own poverty made him diffident about proceeding further. He was preparing the ground. She certainly did not discourage him. She knew that he was not actually the humble lover he made himself out to be, that he would if he were so determined carry her off in spite of any opposition, providing she were willing to accompany him. There was a sort of recklessness about him, a quality of dash which won her admiration, quite as much as his handsome appearance. Secure in the knowledge that he loved her, loving him in return, she was content to wait.

### III

**M**R. CHAFFERY was a man possessed of a genius for finance. His interests were wide, and his name in the City was one to conjure by. He had built up his position with sheer industry and business acumen, and had got on rapidly. As a young man he had been successful, prosperous ; wealth came to him early. Everything he touched seemed to succeed. He consulted no one, had no respect for any man's opinion if it were opposed to his own. He would never have thought of taking advice. By nature he was as hard and clear and unchanging as the metal he coined so easily. Men said of him that he would make a bad enemy ; not that he had been known to be at enmity with anyone ; possibly the hardness of his manner accounted for this belief. No one ever remarked that he would make a good friend. He had no faculty for friendship. In his youth he had had no time for making friends ; in later life the inclination was lacking, not the opportunity. The Golden Key opens many doors.

He was one of the loneliest men in London, and was unaware of his loneliness. He was too absorbed and specialized to heed such things.

His leisure hours were brief. One hour he devoted daily, whenever possible, to the reading of the news-

papers, which he contrived to peruse at his club. This was the sole use he had for a club, save that sometimes he lunched there. When he had finished his papers he left and went home.

Every hour, every minute of his day practically was mapped out and filled up to the time he drove home each evening, and shed the burden of his big undertakings until the next day.

A fellow-member of his club, ignorant of Chaffery's unsociable proclivities, and his religious observance of his daily rule, once broke in upon his reading to inquire of him the secret of success in business, to which he undoubtedly held the key. Chaffery had lowered his newspaper just sufficiently to view the inquirer over the top, and had answered tersely :

“Control your own business, and mind your own business.”

Thereupon, having delivered himself of his capacity of advice, he had raised the newspaper sharply to its former level, as though it were a shutter, snapping off the conversation, and had subsided behind it, to the disconcerted astonishment of the man athirst for knowledge.

As Chaffery would have expressed it, a man must hunt his own meat and not pick another's bones.

His private life was almost as much a routine as his business life. He returned each evening to his house in time to dress for the eight o'clock dinner. Occasionally there were guests ; business dinners they were usually. More often he dined with his daughter alone. Since she had many engagements he spent generally

a solitary evening in the room that was known as his study, and in which he read poetry on most nights, sitting in his deep morocco chair, with a small table at his elbow, plentifully equipped with decanters and soda water and an inexhaustible supply of Havanas.

Poetry was the heel of Achilles in an otherwise invulnerable hide ; it was the touch of inconsistency in the man's composition. What there might be of romance and softness latent in his soul his Maker alone knew. Possibly his dead wife had touched this disused chord. Some sentiment and romance he must have brought to their wooing. Yet these qualities seemed to be divorced entirely from his nature in later years. He was a hard drinker, a hard thinker, a hard man.

This was the host with whom Mark Renshaw lunched a few days following their encounter in the railway train. A dull lunch it proved. Renshaw had accepted the invitation in the surprise of the moment, and not from any desire to lunch with Mr. Chaffery, whom he hardly knew. He was a little overwhelmed with the great man's condescension. That he was the cynosure of many eyes and the subject of particular interest as the guest of the important and unsociable Chaffery, he was aware. That in itself did not disconcert him. As a barrister he was proof against criticism ; but his amazement if it did not surpass the curious surprise of the club members present on this memorable occasion, more than equalled it. It was such an astonishing thing that he should be Chaffery's guest. It was a sort of mark of distinction.

Mr. Chaffery himself appeared conscious of this. He was doing an unusual thing. It went beyond the bounds of necessary courtesy to entertain this young man to lunch in return for an act of casual civility. He felt a little impatient with himself for his impulsive hospitality; which feeling did not predispose him towards geniality.

The lunch dragged its dreary course to a finish, and the two men sat over their coffee and liqueur and smoked reflectively. Renshaw had touched politics tentatively, and had abandoned the subject with judicious haste. He had tried the drama with even less success. Mr. Chaffery avoided the theatre like the plague.

"These modern plays," he said irritably,—“rotten. One beastly intrigue following upon the last. There's no decency, no big theme. It's all sloppy sentiment, and illicit love-making, and weak characterization. These present-day writers lack imagination, they lack strength. They are all doing the same dirty work. Life isn't as vicious as our dramatists and novelists would have it appear. A few people lead decent, orderly lives.”

"Oh! quite a number," Renshaw hastened to agree.

"They don't come your way," Mr. Chaffery retorted. "Your profession brings you into touch with the seamy side of human nature. By the way, I saw your name in the newspapers recently. You were briefed for the defence in that vile blackmail case. I was very pleased to see your client lost the day.”

Renshaw involuntarily smiled.



"I'm sorry you seem conversant only with one of my least successful cases," he said.

"I'm not. I've heard quite a lot about you. You are one of the promising younger men, so they say. Of course you've not got far enough for one to judge with any certainty, but you are swimming strong, I understand."

"That's very nice," Renshaw said, and being fairly modest he blushed.

Mr. Chaffery snipped the end off a cigar and lighted it.

"I'll give you some work to do one day," he said, "when you've shown your mettle a bit more."

"I shall be proud and happy to carry through to a successful issue, or otherwise, any case you entrust to me," was the ready answer, an answer which for some reason pleased Mr. Chaffery. It suggested that the speaker was ready to undertake anything, and to do his best for it, even were it in the nature of a forlorn hope.

"We'll see," he said, and puffed for a while in silence. Presently he looked up, waved aside with his hand the smoke cloud which hovered between them, and asked directly: "Who was that fellow in the carriage, the fair man, who took my seat?"

Renshaw regarded the speaker fixedly for the fraction of a second, a second charged with an eloquent silence; then he said, in his quiet pleasant tones:

"When anything of a regrettable nature like that happens within my vicinity I set myself to forget it immediately."

"I see." Mr. Chaffery was not wholly displeased with this reply, although it embodied a rebuke; the second rebuke, he recalled, which he had suffered from the same source. "It is of no moment," he added. "I am not likely to meet him again. If I do I shall remember him."

Tenacity of purpose, admirable in itself, is less estimable when applied to matters better forgotten. Renshaw sipped his coffee and said nothing. The affair was rather absurd, he decided, and supposed it was vanity which kept alive this smouldering indignation. It was rather small coming from the big man. He endeavoured to get Chaffery to talk about the race meeting; but, save when he was on the course and held by the excitement of following the chances of the horse he had backed, the subject did not interest him. His knowledge of horses was not great, and embraced no love for them.

The talk ceased to be conversational and fell into disconnected chunks. Finally Chaffery rose, and his guest felt like a prisoner suddenly and unexpectedly reprieved. When he found himself alone outside the club he drew a long breath.

"Please God, never again!" he said, and smiled whimsically.

Chaffery's relationship to Iris was alone responsible for his having suffered so heavy a time with cheerfulness.

Iris! The beautiful unattainable star. He had loved her from the time of their first meeting, two years earlier. But he had never spoken to her of his

love because it was so very apparent that her liking for him was purely friendly. He never stood a chance with her, and he knew it. That was quite clear even before the discovery that Hennelly was the chosen man forced home the consciousness of the futility of his hope that one day in a dim and distant and bewildering future she might look upon him with greater kindliness.

Renshaw tried to convince himself that it was not jealousy which influenced his judgment in pronouncing against the suitability of Nigel Hennelly as a husband for Iris Chaffery. He had nothing against the man personally; Hennelly was indeed a friend of his; but there were men with more promising futures and possessed of greater mental qualities who were competitors for the hand of Chaffery's daughter. Her choice had fallen upon the least eligible of her suitors. But so well did they pair that it seemed as if it must be a law of nature that they should come together, the big blonde man, whose Viking beauty contrasted so well with the dark loveliness of the girl. They were a striking couple by reason of their good looks, their wonderful vitality and joy of life.

#### IV

“IRIS, will you marry me?”

A bald little speech, but the man who uttered it was moved to the depths of his soul; his voice shook, his face was set and white. He loved this girl with all the strength of which he was capable, and he felt himself to be entirely unworthy of her. It was presumption on his part to ask her to marry him. He had so little to offer; and she was beautiful, wealthy. It would be said of him that he was fortune hunting. What of it? It was a damned lie anyhow. He worshipped her; had she been a pauper he would have wanted her just the same. He hung on her answer, nervous, shaking. It seemed so long before she spoke.

She took a rose from the bunch he had given her and put it to her lips and then to his.

“Nigel, I love you,” she said.

He brushed the rose aside and caught her in his arms.

“My darling!” he cried, and held her. “Oh, my dearest, how proud and glad you make me!” He kissed her. “That means yes, doesn’t it, Iris?”

“It means yes.” She looked up at him, and the beautiful eyes were thoughtful. “It’s not going to be easy, though. Father doesn’t like you.”

“I’m not going to marry your father,” he said.

"No. But—he can make things unpleasant."

"I suppose he can. If I am sufficiently penitent, perhaps he may relent. He can't forbid our marriage anyway."

"No, he can't do that."

She disengaged herself from his arms and walked to the window and stood there, outlined against the fading daylight and the dull blue of the curtains, looking out upon the darkening street. It was raining. The atmosphere was a wet greyness, and the pavements were shiny and pitted with puddles.

"It will be two hours before he returns home. Perhaps you had better wait and see him. If he is going to be nice about it, he will ask you to stay and dine. Oh, Nigel, I hope he will be nice!"

She held out a hand to him, and he joined her at the window. They stood in the deep embrasure side by side and looked out on the dreary prospect together.

"See! the skies weep. That is not a happy omen."

"They so often weep in London," he said. "Think of the countless lovers who have watched the rain while they confessed their love. The rain's all right."

They moved away from the window when presently a servant came into the room, and turned on the lights, and drew the heavy curtains, shutting out the greyness. While the man was in the room they assumed what they believed to be an ordinary social manner; but it would not have deceived a far less astute person. The splash of colour of red roses lying on the sofa, the appearance together of the man and girl in the embrasure of the window, the flushed excitement of the



girl's look, and the man's overdone appearance of ease, these things told their own tale. It was useless to attempt to dissemble.

When they were alone again a sort of shyness fell upon them. They seated themselves at opposite ends of the sofa, on which the roses still lay, a mass of dewy sweetness, acting as a fragrant barrier between them. The man felt nervous. It is something of an ordeal to propose to a girl in any case, to follow this up with an unpleasant interview with the girl's father, who already had against him a score for ill manners to which would be added profound contempt for his financial position when this matter came up for consideration, was not a heartening prospect.

As the minutes passed and his nervousness increased, Hennelly began to wish that something, anything, a street accident even, might hold up Mr. Chaffery, if it didn't finish him altogether. He wanted very urgently to postpone the interview. Given a choice he would have eloped with Iris and left the rest to chance.

He knew very surely that Mr. Chaffery would not be pleased. It was possible that he would refuse to sanction their marriage, which would prove extremely awkward. He touched upon this possibility; but Iris missed its significance.

"Mr. Chaffery may refuse his consent," he said. He looked so dejected as this idea obtruded itself that Iris hastened to reassure him.

"He couldn't prevent our marrying; I'm of age," she said.

"Yes. But it would be extremely awkward."

"How?—awkward?" she asked.

"Oh, well!" he hastened to explain, and felt himself colouring under her scrutiny. "It's unpleasant to start life with a family feud."

"Yes. But he will come round in time. He must."

Nigel hoped that her amiable belief would prove justified. If Mr. Chaffery did not "come round" it would be more than awkward, it would be a disaster.

"You know, Iris," he said presently, and possessed himself of her hand, which he gripped warmly, "I'm not rich. I'm a poor man. Really I have no right to propose marriage to you. That, I am afraid, is the view your father will take of it."

"I don't see why it should matter when he has so much," she said. "He can't spend it all; and he's only got me."

It never entered her head that the inexhaustible balance at the bank on which she was permitted to draw might be withheld from her if she acted against her father's wishes: it entered however into Hennelly's calculations with disquieting persistence. It was the sort of retaliation which a man like Chaffery would make. But surely in the end he would give in. As Iris said, she was his only child. He could not cherish ill feeling against her indefinitely. Hennelly would have liked to run off with her and chance what followed. He was so certain of the kind of reception which awaited him that as he stayed on for the purpose of his interview with Mr. Chaffery a chilled feeling came over him; the waiting unnerved him.

"I'll need a whisky and soda after this," he said.  
"I've got cold feet."

"Have a cocktail," she suggested, and rang the bell and gave the necessary order.

"Many a battle has been fought and won on Dutch courage," he said, as he manipulated the 'shaker and poured a cocktail out for each. He carried her glass to her and touched the rim of it with his own. "Here's to our long life and happiness, my dear, together!"

They drank the toast, and Iris named another.

"May your persuasive powers exceed your courage, faint heart!"

They both laughed happily. The man returned to the sofa, and seated himself close to her, and became more confident in manner.

"How about eloping, Iris?" he asked.

She did not take him seriously.

"It would be rather a lark, wouldn't it?"

"Well, why not?"

"But, Nigel," she said, and clasped her hands tragically. "How about the bridal dress and the cake and the wedding in Hanover Square? I've dreamed of these things; every girl does."

"I hate all that fuss," he said.

"Most men do; but they get through it somehow."

"There will be no Hanover Square wedding for us if your father refuses his consent," he reminded her.

"No." She smiled suddenly. "That will be one source of consolation for you."

"Since he is fairly certain to refuse, to elope seems to me the more agreeable plan," he urged.

“Nigel, dear!” She turned to him and laid a caressing hand upon his shoulder. The wonderful dark eyes, fringed with their heavy black lashes, lifted to his with a look of swift reproof. “If we did that we should never be forgiven. I know my father; and I’m quite sure that if I did anything which seemed to him underhand he would have finished with me. He’s straight. He wouldn’t understand our motive. To defy him will need courage, but to deceive him would be the unforgivable sin. I wouldn’t dare risk it.”

“All right,” he said. “You know him better than I do.” He took the beautiful face between his hands and kissed the warm fresh lips. “Darling, I want to do what is best for you. I don’t wish to make any estrangement between you and your father. I’ll do all I can to prevent that, save give you up.”

The look of trustfulness, of love and admiration which she gave him, touched him; he felt that he would go through fire and water for her sake. Could he have got the interview over there and then his courage and self-control might have proved equal to the occasion; but the suspense of waiting for Mr. Chaffery’s return, reminiscent of a wait at the dentist’s, filled him with a dull sense of apprehension, a growing uneasiness. He had once as a boy walked out of a dentist’s waiting-room as the result of a less acute attack of nervousness than he experienced now. The memory of that occasion recurred with surprising vividness after the lapse of years. If he could only follow that youthful precedent! But independent

action was his no longer. It wasn't his toothache only. This torture concerned the girl beside him equally with himself; to get up and go away was to desert her. He had to sit it out.

To aggravate matters, Mr. Chaffery was late in getting home. He had been detained in the City, and was much put out over certain business undertakings which had miscarried. He returned home in a mood of great irritability. His ill-humour was increased to a state of exasperation when, on his way to his room to dress for dinner, a servant waylaid him with the information that a gentleman waited in the drawing-room to see him. On learning the name of the gentleman, a name which conveyed little to him, he waved an impatient hand, and moved forward towards the staircase.

"Tell him to go to hell," he said, and began the ascent.

The man looked after him, perplexed. It was not an agreeable message to deliver in the hearing of a lady. The lady herself relieved him of the necessity for delivering the message. She stepped out upon the landing, and intercepted her father on his way to his room.

## V

“ FATHER, Mr. Nigel Hennelly is here. He would like to meet you. I want you to be very great friends.”

Iris took Mr. Chaffery by the arm and drew him, protesting, towards the drawing-room door.

“ It’s late,” he said. “ I have to dress. Another day . . .”

He puffed from lack of breath. But Iris knew what delay meant. She was obdurate.

“ It is late. He has been waiting a terribly long while to see you. There is time enough before dinner.”

The reluctant Mr. Chaffery was urged towards the door, which stood invitingly wide, revealing in part the handsome interior of the room, but not its nervous occupant, who stood awkwardly in the centre of the Persian carpet obviously embarrassed as to what service to apply his hands and feet. He fidgeted these quite useful, but at the moment, horridly obtrusive members, while his mouth remained fixed in a strained and anxious smile. Mr. Chaffery called it a grin. He described the man in his thoughts as an insolent and grinning idiot.

“ You, sir !” he shouted, and stood still, regarding Hennelly with a hostile stare.

The stereotyped pleasantry of the young man’s



features faded, his mouth fell into graver lines. It was all exactly as he had apprehended it would be. Mr. Chaffery was going to be difficult. The interview would be unpleasant and unsatisfactory. He felt at a loss for words. The situation presented immense difficulties. Mr. Chaffery evidently retained a rankling memory of their last meeting. What response could a man make to such an opening, particularly in the circumstances, desiring as he did to propitiate the speaker? He glanced helplessly at Iris. She appeared worried and almost as nervous as himself, but she rallied to the occasion marvellously.

"Father, I want you to forget that you have seen Nigel before, and start from to-day without any prejudice."

"Nigel! Nigel!" he snapped. "Hasn't he any other name?"

"Mr. Hennelly, then," she proceeded. "Please, father, give him an opportunity to explain."

"Who is preventing him from explaining?" fumed Mr. Chaffery. "And what the devil is there to explain?—beyond his damned impertinence in coming here."

Hennelly seemed to come out of the dazed inaction which had rooted him so far to one spot in the pattern on the carpet, and to become surprisingly collected and determined.

"Half a moment, sir, before we go any further," he said, and, to Mr. Chaffery's indignant amaze, he took Iris firmly by the arm and put her outside the door.

"You had better leave us," he said to her quietly. "Don't worry, it will be all right."

Then he shut the door upon her disturbed and inarticulate beauty and returned to confront her irate father.

"Now, sir," he said; "let's get on with this job. In the first instance, I wish to say how extremely sorry I am for the discourtesy of my behaviour on a certain occasion which I perceive you have not forgotten. I regret that unfortunate incident exceedingly. I hope you will accept my apology."

"I will accept nothing from you, sir; not even a seat in future," Mr. Chaffery roared.

Hennelly reddened.

"I have expressed my sincere regret," he said. "There is nothing more I can say."

"Who's asking you to say more? I have no desire to have any conversation with you. Get out of my house, and don't presume to enter it again."

Resisting a strong inclination to obey this injunction literally and at once, Hennelly schooled himself to bear patiently with the man because of his love for the man's daughter. He met Mr. Chaffery's angry gaze with a calm, deliberate look intended to be disarming; but which had quite another effect upon Mr. Chaffery, who was unaccustomed to be, as he expressed it in his thoughts, stared impudently out of countenance by a man he saw fit to reprimand. His anger rapidly grew.

"I have waited over two hours, Mr. Chaffery, for this interview," Hennelly said gravely. "I shall be

obliged to you if you will have the patience to hear me out. I am in love with your daughter——”

“How dare you, sir?” Mr. Chaffery interrupted with heat.

The question, and not the tone in which it was put, gave Nigel Hennelly pause. How dared he? Look at it how one might, it was the height of presumption on his part. He faltered, quite obviously taken aback; finally he said, with considerably less assurance:

“Really, I don’t know, sir; but I am.”

The admission, which might have moved to sympathy anyone less obdurate, made no appeal to Mr. Chaffery. He summarized it as more impudence, and his anger increased. The veins on his temples swelled visibly and formed into curious knots. Hennelly’s eyes were attracted to these bulging arteries; he had never noticed a man’s veins knotted like cord before. Mr. Chaffery’s face was purple.

“You don’t know!” he shouted. “If you don’t know, I do; and I will quickly enlighten you. You dare because you are aware that I am a man of considerable means and that she is my only daughter. That is the motive of your daring. You are an adventurer, a vulgar fortune hunter, a——”

“Sir, this is insufferable.” Hennelly broke in on the torrent of abuse, which flowed from the older man’s lips in a stream he was only able to stem by raising his own voice above the abusive tones of the speaker, and literally shouting him down. “It’s a damned lie, whoever says it. If you were not her father I would knock you down for that. And it’s an insult to her.

Any man would desire to marry her if she hadn't a penny to her name."

"She hasn't a penny to her name," Mr. Chaffery returned, with less heat, and with the manner of a man sure of his ground and inflexible of purpose. "If she marries without my consent she will never have a penny of my money. The man therefore who marries her against my wishes will enjoy the satisfying knowledge that he is wedding a penniless girl. As you say, any man should be proud to marry my daughter under such a condition. I agree with you. You have the opportunity of disproving any mercenary motive by marrying Iris. But I do not fear that you will do so."

A cold sense of defeat came over Hennelly. The speaker's words carried conviction. He believed that the man meant what he said, that he would certainly carry out his threat. He might marry Iris; there was nothing to prevent him from doing so, only his own poverty and her similar condition. He flared up however at the sneer contained in Mr. Chaffery's final sentence. It went to show how much faith Chaffery placed in his declaration of disinterested love; he imagined he was out for money.

"I will marry Iris, despite you," he flung back fiercely, "if she comes to me only in the clothes in which she stands up."

"Oh! she will take her entire wardrobe with her," Mr. Chaffery retorted ironically. "Don't you worry."

The duologue hung for a moment, during which the

two men faced one another, watchfully, like enemies alert against attack. Then Hennelly said :

“ What have you got against me—beyond that ridiculous incident in the train ? ”

That was not a wise question ; it forced home to Mr. Chaffery’s undoubtedly capable brain the unreasonableness of a prejudice that had its foundation on a thing so trivial in itself. It is the trivial things which witness to a man’s character : the inability to overlook a slight to himself revealed his own weakness mercilessly.

“ I don’t like you,” he answered curtly. “ I have no intention of explaining that, or any other matter to you. I refuse to entertain the idea of your marriage with my daughter. What income, I should like to know, have you which encourages you in imagining you are a suitable husband for her, or could support her in any degree of comfort, such as she is accustomed to ? ”

“ Since you refuse to entertain my proposal to marry your daughter, I don’t see that my income is any concern of yours,” Hennelly replied.

“ As you like,” Mr. Chaffery returned. “ Your answer in itself convinces me that you can’t afford to marry my daughter and that you know it.”

“ I *will* marry your daughter,” Hennelly said.

“ We will see. In the meantime, for your further information, and in order to avert any indiscretion which in a desire to defy me you may be tempted to commit, I may as well state now that in the event of your carrying out the very rash resolve you have

formed, I will immediately disinherit my daughter, so that she will need to look to you for everything in the future and enjoy no prospect of any benefit under my will. That, in view of your disinterested motives, should give you immense satisfaction. I will leave everything I possess to the hospitals, which need money and will administer my fortune more wisely than you would. You need not hope that I will reconsider that decision."

"You will do as you please, of course," Hennelly said, his face white with anger. "I don't think that decree, unnatural though it sounds, is likely to deter either of us. I believe that Iris will be as willing to be poor with me as I am to face hardship and fight it for her sake."

Mr. Chaffery was a little unprepared for this attitude. He tried to persuade himself that it was sheer bluff; but his confidence was somewhat shaken.

"Iris doesn't know what poverty is; it's only a word to her," he said. "She doesn't know the value of money. You would be a fool, and worse, if you married a girl like Iris without a sufficient income on which to support her. You will find her an expensive fad, not a helpmate. She is used to having everything she wants. So long as she is dutiful she will continue to have everything she wants. If your love is worth anything it should influence you to leave her to the enjoyment of the conditions she is accustomed to and without which she could not be happy. I am advising you for your good."

"My love is strong enough to override the obstacles



you are putting in its path," Hennelly said quietly, but with a shade less firmness Mr. Chaffery fancied. The statement that he would leave all his fortune to charities was an unexpected blow. It was little short of amazing that a man should carry his spite on to the next world. Inhuman, Hennelly considered it.

"Then there is nothing more to be said," Mr. Chaffery observed in an excess of frigid wrath,—“save that I will use every influence I possess to prevent you from marrying my daughter.”

“Before I leave,” Hennelly said, “I would like to speak to her.”

“Damn your insolence, sir!” Mr. Chaffery fumed, veering from the frigid to the torrid zone. “You will not interview my daughter in my house now or at any future time.”

Hennelly made a gesture of contemptuous impatience.

“You are unreasonable,” he said.

He wrenched open the door, and there, standing outside, so that he knew she must have overheard their raised voices, if indeed she had not been listening to them, was Iris, white and trembling, like a tragic muse, with her dark eyes black in her pale face.



## VI

“**I** RIS!” he said.

“Oh!” she breathed on a low deep note, and clasped her hand round his arm and drew him on with her. “This way. Quick!”

He followed in undignified haste. They entered a room opposite, which was presumedly her private sitting-room. She closed the door after them and drew a long breath.

Mr. Chaffery meanwhile was ringing the bell savagely for a servant to show the intruder out. When he emerged upon the landing there was no sign of his recent unwelcome visitor. Fuming, he went to his own room to dress. Not within his memory had he been so ruffled and upset as now. During the process of dressing he reflected unflatteringly on Hennelly’s nerve.

“The swine!” he muttered. “Thinking he would drop in for a soft thing. . . . Wanting a place to hang up his hat in. . . . Looking round for money to squander which he hadn’t troubled to earn. . . . Swine! . . . Damned swine! . . .”

And on the lower landing the man he consigned at the finish of his reflections recklessly to perdition, was holding his daughter in his arms and swearing with heartfelt earnestness that nothing short of death should

come between them. It is extraordinary how stimulating opposition can prove.

"I knew he wouldn't be pleased, but I didn't think he would be so horrid about it," Iris said. "Why shouldn't I marry anyone I want to? It's my life. I don't see what it has to do with him."

"He thinks you will be afraid of poverty, that you won't be able to do without the luxury you are accustomed to," Hennelly said. "I told him I didn't care a damn for his money, that we'd get along without it. But he believes you won't be able to."

Iris smiled up at him trustfully. There was admiration as well as love for him in her eyes.

"Of course I'm not afraid," she said; and it was quite evident to him that, as her father had stated, she had not the remotest conception of what was meant by giving up things. "We could live in a small house, I suppose. I'd prefer a flat. One of those nice new flats, with a restaurant attached. It would be quite good fun."

The kind of flat she had in mind was beyond his means altogether, but he did not go into that then. A suite of rooms in Bloomsbury was more within his scope. Marriage on his income would mean hardship for him as well as for her. He had extravagant tastes, the gratifying of which exceeded his modest means as it was.

"I'd better look round for a job," he said. "If I could supplement my present income we'd get along all right. I'll see what's going."

"Yes, do." She kissed him happily. "And I'll attend a course on domestic economy."

It was evident she meant to do her bit towards easing the strain. Hennelly could have laughed, only he was afraid of hurting her feelings; she was so obviously quite sincere.

He was pledged now. She was ready to marry him whatever the conditions. He experienced a vindictive satisfaction in defying her father; as he expressed it in his thoughts, he was getting even with the old devil.

"There will be no wedding in Hanover Square," he said.

"No." She smiled. "I don't know that I mind so very much. You are having things your way. It will be the elopement after all."

"I suppose there is no possibility of your winning him over?" he asked doubtfully, after a while.

Iris did not appear sanguine.

"I'll try, of course. I'll go on trying. Naturally I don't want to quarrel with my father. He is my father—the best I can produce." She laughed. "It seems absurd when one is grown to marriageable age that one has to ask permission to do what one ought to be able to do off one's own bat. And he's so obstinate. When once he has made up his mind nothing shakes it. Thank goodness, I am going out to-night. I shall have a positively horrid time during dinner. You have no idea how disagreeable he can be."

"Haven't I?" he said grimly.

She patted his cheek.

"What did he say to you? Anything very dreadful?"

"Oh! a few rather beastly things. But never mind, we won't think about that. I'm sorry I've got to leave you to face the music alone; but clearly it wouldn't help matters if I were present at dinner. He'd be equal to flinging things at me, or having me forcibly ejected. I'm forbidden the house, so we'll have to devise ways and means of meeting. That shouldn't be difficult. Don't worry. I'll find a way out."

"Nigel, you are wonderful," she said, her eyes shining.

They clung together in an excess of mutual admiration; love thwarted but triumphant, resolved to win through it all costs, to vindicate its right by the sacrifices it was prepared to make. He was ready to undertake anything in order to win her. Her belief in him was touching in its simple sincerity. Neither of them placed very much faith in Mr. Chaffery's threat, spoken they felt on an impulse of anger, to leave all his money to charity, and omit his daughter's name altogether from his will. That did not seem possible. But Mr. Chaffery was not old, and, so far as they knew, he was a healthy man. To count upon anything so seemingly remote as his possible demise was about as safe as backing a rank outsider; there was nothing in it for two young people desirous of getting married early and having a good time while youth and the ability to enjoy remained theirs. A handsome allowance was the least Iris considered that her father should do for her. He ought to want to see her happy. But he never wanted anything but

just his own things, his own will. Now he wanted her to turn her back on her lover because he was not a man after his pattern. It was ridiculous.

During dinner Mr. Chaffery was noticeably silent, a figure of grim and stony displeasure. The only remark he made was to the butler, at whom he swore fiercely. The butler was far more nervous than Iris was ; his nervousness made him clumsy.

Iris's indignation was too keen to allow her to feel awed by the majesty of Mr. Chaffery's displeasure. She kept reiterating in her thoughts the one word, ridiculous. Her father was ridiculous ; and he was making her appear ridiculous also.

She saw him for a few minutes before leaving home. She had hoped to avoid an interview that night ; but on her way downstairs she had to pass the door of his study, and he had left this door open, she believed with the intention of waylaying her. He was standing where he could not fail to see her pass, however quietly she attempted to slip by ; and when he saw her he held up an arresting hand, like a policeman on traffic duty, and called to her to come in.

"Shut the door," he said curtly, when Iris, thinking to beat a retreat at the first opportunity, left it wide. "Now, what's all this ?" he said. "I've been frightfully annoyed this evening. That bounder—Hennelly. . . . A common fortune hunter ! You don't need to pick out trash like that just because he's after your money."

"I understood," his daughter answered him coldly, with so marked a touch of his own manner that an



onlooker would have deduced the relationship at a glance, "that I have no money, and that you made this abundantly clear to him. That disproves the fortune hunting, I should have thought."

"Oh, should you?"

His tone was nasty. Obviously her answer was unexpected; it left him for the moment ill-prepared with a retort. He had been ready for tears, expostulations even, anything but this cold aloofness which sought to show him that she didn't care a rap for his opinion. He was attacking her choice. She wouldn't stand that. The strain of hardness in her nature, an inheritance from himself of which he could not deprive her, was in the ascendant. Her brilliant loveliness showed to advantage beneath the disdainful mask which robbed her features of their girlishness but nothing of their beauty.

Her father was a little overcome by the vision she presented of imperial loveliness, unmoved by his wrath and unafraid. His daughter was the one person he could not intimidate. He had seen men crumple up under a glance from him, shrink before his anger; but he might have blazed away until the roof fell before she would have blenched. She faced him now, a little scornful, with an attentive look that was faintly critical, as though she wondered about him and that queer mentality of his which was such a strange blend of cleverness with lesser and meaner qualities.

Ridiculous! She kept repeating the word to herself, as though it summed up her entire reflection in relation to him and to the situation. Ridiculous. . . .

It was ridiculous, and a trifle undignified, as such situations invariably are. He was conscious of the lack of dignity, and this, adding to his rage, had him at greater disadvantage.

"You are vain enough to believe, I take it, that he wants you for yourself alone?" he sneered.

"I imagine that he wants me, as I want him," she replied calmly, and with the faintest tinge of colour staining the pallor of her cheeks, "for the same old reason which led you to want my mother."

"Leave your mother out of this," he jerked out, avoiding her glance.

Iris made no response. She sometimes wondered whether he had cared for her mother. It was difficult to conceive of him caring for anyone.

"You're infatuated. And you are bent on going against my wishes," he rapped out savagely. "You'll find that a grave mistake. I'm a better judge of men than you are. Men like Hennelly—the world's full of them—are out for their own hand. They are our social loafers. In another class of life they fill the casual wards—or they did before the dole made a worse menace of them."

"You had better be careful," she broke in in clear cold tones. "You are saying unforgivable things. You haven't anything against him, save that one little stupid thing. You don't know him."

"I have no intention of knowing him better, whether you bring him into the family or not," he rejoined.

"Oh!" she exclaimed with an impatient gesture. "You are altogether unreasonable. Why did you ask

me to come in here merely to abuse the man I love?"

"I didn't. I asked you to come in here to talk sense, only you won't. Give up all thought of this man, Iris, and you shall have anything you want that I can give you."

"The stone in lieu of bread!" she said, and laughed derisively. "Keep your gold. You have no heart, no understanding. You think money's everything. I'll do without it. I'll go to Nigel with empty hands and work for him."

"Fine talking," he sneered. "You couldn't do it, either of you. You'll hate one another within a year when the shoe begins to pinch. You're a fool. You've no understanding, no knowledge of life. You don't know what work is. You couldn't do it. You're no use. You hear!—you're useless."

He stormed at her, while across the stress of angry words, of angry looks and bitter emotions, her beauty blazed reproach at him, and dried up the torrent of his words.

Ridiculous! her thought ran. Ridiculous. . . .

## VII

**S**TARTING with feelings of fierce resentment against her father's attitude towards her engagement to Nigel Hennelly, Iris found herself later enjoying a melancholy distinction in the romantic rôle of one who renounces everything for love's sake. She felt as the novice might feel when considering leaving the world for spiritual reasons; her attitude was almost triumphant.

"I do love you, Nigel," she told him. "I love you so much I won't mind being poor, if you don't."

"I hate poverty," he replied. "I shall hate it all the more on your account. But I can't give you up, Iris. It's a beastly shame, your father behaving as he is doing. It's shabby. He's trying to make me leave go. I'll be hanged if I will. Rich or poor, I want you—just you, for your own sweet sake."

Of course he wanted her for her own sake, just as she wanted him for the best of all possible reasons, the reason which is as old as life itself. It was unthinkable that anything should come between them.

Into her confidence she took Mona Anstruther, a married school-friend, with whom she had maintained a continued intimacy since the days of their eager mutual confidences of the schoolroom, which had

seemed so important in those care-free days, when adoration of some popular hero, unknown to themselves, afforded many a girlish thrill.

Mona was wonderfully comforting and inspiring. She preached rebellion. She cherished the same view in relation to the importance of love above everything, particularly duty, and she entertained the same indifference for poverty. She knew as little about poverty as Iris knew. She had never experienced it, or known anyone who suffered the inconvenience of not being able to have pretty well everything they wanted. Actual privation was something she could not have imagined. And so her advice to this daughter of a millionaire was defiance of parental anger by means of an elopement to the Continent, in the pursuance of which she proposed to assist in such way as she was able. She did not consult her husband in advance, which was unfortunate, since he saw the matter in an entirely different light, and was distinctly annoyed when she confided in him her plans for the young people's assistance. They had their first domestic wrangle over Iris's affair.

"You shouldn't interfere in these matters," he told her. "Let people fight out their own battles. What business is it of yours?"

"But she's my friend, Richard. I must hold out a helping hand. Imagine, if anyone had objected to our getting married!"

"No one was likely to object. I could provide suitably for you. You don't need to look to anyone to help pay your housekeeping bills. Old Chaffery

has a perfect right to object to Hennelly. He's in debt. How can he support a wife? "

" I think old Chaffery might allow them something."

" Most people will agree with you; I do myself. At the same time, we don't know what grounds he has for his objection. He's pretty shrewd."

" Perhaps. But she is his only daughter. He might let her marry whom she likes."

" That doesn't always work out for the best."

" But she is very much in love. So is Nigel," Mona insisted.

" His point of view is perfectly understandable," he returned ironically.

" It seems rotten they shouldn't be able to marry just because old Chaffery doesn't like him," Mona pursued. " Iris says it is all because he didn't give up his seat to the old autocrat in a railway carriage. Absurd prejudice! "

Anstruther grinned. " That's a lesson in good manners for Nigel that should impress itself on him for all time. I can't believe the thing hangs on anything so trivial as that."

" That's what Iris says; and she is generally truthful."

" Well, you can take it from me, if Nigel's bank balance equalled his presumption, Mr. Chaffery, even if he declined to bestow his blessing, would not set his face against the marriage in the way he is doing. There is more in it than meets the eye. You should not have invited her to stay here. I don't want any elopements from my house."



"I've done more than that," his wife informed him with amazing calmness ; " I've offered them Greenway Manor for the honeymoon."

This information led to a display of anger such as Mona had not supposed her husband capable of. If she had suspected him of possessing a temper, she had not imagined it could ever be excited against her. And here he was flying into a rage and calling her a fool.

" I don't want to quarrel with Chaffery," he finished. " The man is within his right in refusing his consent to this marriage. I'm not for aiding and abetting his daughter. They can't have Greenway Manor."

" But I've promised it," Mona said.

" I can't help that. It's not at their disposal. The first thing Nigel will do will be to borrow money from me."

" You can afford to lend him some."

" Nice practical wife, you are ! " he returned with sarcasm. " I can't afford to run his matrimonial venture. That's what it would come to."

" He would pay you back. Nigel wouldn't borrow money if he didn't intend to refund it."

" Oh ! he'd intend to all right ; but the will to pay wouldn't provide the means. You've got no common sense. And I don't choose to be mixed up in it," he said.

" I can't go back on my best friend," Mona asserted obstinately.

" You prefer to go back on me."

Anstruther's temper was thoroughly roused. His wife was too amazed then to experience the pain and

indignation she was conscious of later when reviewing what had passed; at the moment she treated this remark with the contempt it deserved, and made no comment on it.

"You place me in a very unpleasant position," he added. "I shall have to see Nigel and make it clear to him that he can't use my country house for a honeymoon resort."

"I won't be made to look ridiculous," she declared angrily. "How can you say a thing like that? They must have Greenway."

"They jolly well won't," he rejoined, with equal warmth and greater decision. "Let them in there, and you'll never get them out. I won't have it."

"You are growing astonishingly selfish," she said. "And rude. Can't I do anything I like? Isn't it my house too?"

"Oh, drop it!" he cried, exasperated. "You are behaving like a silly kid."

He went out of the room, out of the house, parting from her for the first time since their marriage without kissing her. He left Mona too annoyed to even notice the omission.

Thus Iris's choice, like the stone flung into the stream, widened the circle of its influence and affected other lives.

In Chaffery's home things went on much as usual. Every morning he left it at nine o'clock, seen off by his daughter, who had accompanied him to the door since she left school, and who continued this small attention as though nothing had occurred to destroy

the harmony of their relations ; and every evening he returned at seven-thirty, to find Iris waiting in the drawing-room for him to join her. Somehow it seemed to him incredible that this state of things could ever alter. He did not wish it to alter. He disliked change ; when the threatened change promised to interfere with his comfort, it went beyond dislike with him.

There were times when he hoped she had given up the idea of marrying Hennelly. She never referred to the vexatious subject. Beyond the fact that she went out more than formerly, and that her dress accounts were unusually heavy, there was nothing to excite his suspicions. The enormous bills for wearing apparel might have prepared anyone better versed in the ways of women for the shock that was to follow : Mr. Chaffery merely concluded that she was consoling herself with these fripperies. She had always been expensive, even before she left school. There was nothing remarkable in his being called upon to pay nine hundred and ninety guineas for a fur coat which she had purchased ; but why she needed to purchase three fur coats within as many days puzzled him. He never minded extravagance ; money ought to be circulated ; but he did object to waste. However, if she wanted three fur coats, he felt a certain gratification in reflecting that he could provide them, and a dozen others if necessary ; and that she must realize how impossible it would be for her to indulge these expensive tastes if she left his home for one of Hennelly's providing.

"I am laying in a good trousseau if I can't have

a fashionable wedding," Iris confided to her fiancé, who applauded her forethought.

Neither of them perceived that there was something not quite straight in this. Hennelly, appreciating one fact, that it would save his pocket, overlooked another, the vagaries of fashion and woman's slavish observance of these. Iris was one of the best dressed girls in London. To dress well was an incurable habit with her. Since she shopped at the most expensive places it was an extravagant habit. The extent of her wardrobe was an economy of short duration. To "make do" with dresses of a past season was a sacrifice she would never dream of practising. Could Hennelly have seen the bills which her father was privileged to see and to settle, he would have been amazed. That anyone should pay a thousand pounds for one garment would have been to him unthinkable. It was more than his entire income.

"You are wonderful, Iris," he said, and touched the dark waves of her hair. "My dearest, I can hardly wait. I long to have you with me altogether. It's so rotten we can't get married right away."

"I'm ready when you are," she said.

That was the point; he wasn't ready; he had no home to which to take her, no adequate income on which to support her—only the promise of a man of some influence that he would look out for something for him. This man, General Mellor, was a director on several companies. If anything was going he was safe to get it. He felt hopeful; but to marry on hope was altogether too risky.

“Something will turn up before long,” he said confidently. “Then we’ll slip across the Channel and defy the powers that be. I’ll enjoy being with you in Paris, Iris. My dear, I’ll be frightfully proud—and jealous too of any man who looks at you. It’s an utter amazement to me that you should choose me out of all the crowd.”

That amazed others as well as himself. He was the least eligible suitor for the hand of Chaffery’s daughter.

## VIII

GENERAL MELLOR, who knew Hennelly as a good soldier and a capable engineer, proved something more than the obliging friend who promised readily but made no special effort to fulfil his promise. His influence secured Hennelly a position with a big engineering firm which carried with it a salary of one thousand a year.

To Hennelly this seemed a fortune. His annual income, totalling under two thousand, appeared to him adequate for the purposes of matrimony, though this meant setting up housekeeping with an expensive wife and a number of debts clamouring for settlement.

So excited was he over his good fortune, and so eager to tell Iris the news, that he rang her up on the telephone and breathlessly informed her that they could now safely embark on the hazardous adventure. He inquired how soon she could be ready. Her voice, happily laughing, answered him tantalizingly that she would go into that when they met.

They were to meet that evening at a dance, so that his wait was one only of hours ; but, in his impatience, he wished that she had named that night for their daring exploit. It occurred to him that she was less eager than he was to take the plunge.

When he saw her his doubt on that head vanished.



She was aquiver with excitement. The usually pale skin, clear as alabaster, was warmly flushed; her eyes shone with a wonderful light of happiness. Never had he seen her look more beautiful. A great pride and a great tenderness moved him when he saw her advancing in the soft light of the overhead chandeliers, the loveliest of all the women present, walking like a queen through the press of guests, with her small head carried high on the proud young shoulders.

He was at her side almost before she finished greeting her hostess; and he drew her hand within his arm and led her on to the floor. They could talk now. His arm went round her. He felt as though he were treading on air. The music was playing one of the new waltzes. With the warmth and the sweetness of her so near to him, and the thought ever present in his mind that soon she would belong to him wholly and for ever, he moved like a man in a dream, a dream of beauty and delight from which there should be no awakening.

"Iris," he said, "isn't it good? Just think, a thousand a year, old thing, for sitting in an office doing nothing practically."

A thousand a year! Her dark eyes lifted wonderingly to his. Inexplicably at that moment she was thinking of the coat she had bought only a few days previously, the coat which had cost nine hundred and ninety guineas. It had seemed to her expensive but not unduly extravagant. And here was Nigel exciting himself over a lesser sum, which would none the less represent the greater part of their annual income.

"I suppose with care we might manage," she said.

"Oh, rather! I think so. I'll have to go easy, of course."

"So will I," she said, thinking of the dress accounts she had had rushed in for her father to settle.

"You!" It hadn't occurred to Nigel that her personal expenditure could exceed his. He smiled indulgently. "We'll both be tremendously economical. It will be rather fun seeing how well we can manage on a little. Any fool can spend money; it requires brains to administer a small income satisfactorily."

It required greater brains than he possessed; but he felt then equal to any undertaking. Had she been willing he would have eloped with her that night; but Iris had her plans all prearranged. She was running no risk of detection.

"Thursday. That's the earliest we can do it," she insisted. "Father has a big dinner on in the City that night. He'll be late home. I can walk out of the house and come straight to you, and he won't know anything until breakfast time next day. And there are my things—oh, tons of things. I'll send them to Mona Anstruther's. My maid can follow with them next day."

"Your maid!" Hennelly's tone was blank. "Oh, I say! you don't want a maid on your honeymoon."

He did not see why she should require a maid at all; he did not need a valet.

"But—how can I manage?"

She felt a little bewildered at this unexpected

development. Then suddenly she laughed. It seemed so ludicrous to be discussing these trivial things, which were yet so momentous, on the eve of their great undertaking, amid their present surroundings, to the accompaniment of jazz music and the sound of merriment.

"She does everything for me," she said in a pause.

"I'll do everything for you," he promised. "We'll get along fine without her. Iris, I want you all to myself. I don't want anyone staring at us, making me feel intrusive. I should hate a maid around, all goggle eyes and sentiment. Can't you do without a maid when you've got me?"

"I daresay I might. I can try anyhow."

Her eyes, clear and unafraid, and also uncomprehending, smiled into his. This was the beginning of those sacrifices she only dimly apprehended as necessary in the new life she was so eager to embark upon. The giving up of her maid! It seemed a small thing in itself. It was a small thing. But the suggestion she began to perceive should have come from her and not from Nigel. She felt vexed with herself for not being ready to pull her weight. Naturally she must give up many of the luxuries to which she was accustomed. It would be rather amusing, as he said, trying to manage, doing without things, cutting their garment according to their material. In the glow of enthusiasm the amusing side was conspicuously uppermost. Also the thought that two nights hence she would be leaving her father's home altogether excited her. No girlish sentiment tinged the thought with sadness. Her whole being was in revolt against this tyrannical

parental authority which refused to sanction her marriage with the man of her choice. She rebelled against the necessity to ask permission. It was degrading, as she expressed it to Hennelly, to have to crawl on her knees and beg to be allowed to do what she had a perfect right to do of her own volition. But Hennelly, with no respect for Mr. Chaffery, but an immense respect for Mr. Chaffery's wealth, advised one final appeal.

"Suppose I go along to him to-morrow morning and tell him I've got this job, do you think it would make any difference?" he asked.

"I don't. You may try, if you like. I think the chances are all against your being admitted. It is easier to get near royalty than to approach father in his office. He is hemmed in and body-guarded by a very efficient army of clerks."

"What's that for?" he asked.

"To keep away the people he doesn't wish to see."

"I'm pretty safe to figure in that category," he said.

"I'm afraid so." She laughed softly. "These violent antipathies are rather funny, aren't they?"

"I can't see any joke myself," he returned. "It appeals to me as a disagreeable situation devoid of any vein of humour whatsoever. Will it serve better if I call at the house to-morrow?"

"In defiance of his edict! I don't think that will help matters. Better leave it to me. There's about as much hope of his relenting as of the millennium. Still, I can but try again."

Mona Anstruther, in their full confidence, with a fine

disregard for her husband's prejudices, invited them to dine with her on the eventful evening and start comfortably from her house. There was no question of their using Greenway Manor for the honeymoon because Nigel was taking up his work almost immediately, and had to be in town; so that difficulty smoothed itself out happily. It could not be considered aiding and abetting them simply to invite them to dinner.

"To make the adventure really thrilling," Mona said, "Mr. Chaffery ought to get wind of it, and set out by the airway's service and intercept you."

"In which event Iris would wave her birth certificate in face of his objections, and we should be where we were."

"Father wouldn't trouble to do that," Iris affirmed. "His opposition is never active. It would be easier to overcome possibly if it were."

"There is some saying anent friction against stone that has a heartening sound," Mona interposed. "I can't believe that he won't come down with his blessing and a fat cheque in the course of time. You'll need to be diplomatic."

She glanced at Hennelly as she spoke. Iris laughed.

"I'm afraid that isn't a quality that Nigel is endowed with. He plunges—both feet in the soup at the same time."

She looked round to smile at Mark Renshaw, who came up with them at the moment and claimed the next dance with her.

"Let us take him into our confidence," she said.

"Better not." Nigel's tone was discouraging. "He's too much in with the opposition. We'll keep this to ourselves."

"I'm sorry. I'd love to have told him. Mark's quite safe."

"What are you three hatching? You wear the air of conspirators," Renshaw said.

"That comes of being mixed up with the Law Courts," Mrs. Anstruther retorted. "You are keen for nosing out mischief."

"I was on a scent then?"

"I'll give you three guesses," Iris said, walking away beside him. "But I won't tell you whether you guess right, my modern Sherlock Holmes."

Nigel's expression as he looked after them was not exactly pleased, nor did it lighten at Mrs. Anstruther's next remark.

"I always thought that would be a match," she said.

"Oh really!" He frowned. "Why?"

"He's very deeply in love," she said.

Inexplicably this seemed to amuse him. He met her gaze more confidently.

"So am I," he answered, as though that settled the matter.



## IX

THE making of a final appeal to her father's sense of fair-play and paternal affection, which Iris was resolved upon before taking her irrevocable step, was put off for various reasons until the last moment. It was not until Thursday, the day of the great adventure, that she approached Mr. Chaffery once more on the debatable subject.

During the past two days her belongings had been transferred to Mrs. Anstruther's house in Berkeley Square. Her maid had been packing for a week past in perplexed and unsatisfied curiosity ; packing certain things away for an indefinite time, and others in smaller trunks which were for immediate use. The maid was suspicious ; but she was discreet and kept her own counsel. The one thing which never penetrated her mystified mind was that her services were to be dispensed with altogether. It would have seemed to her incredible that the wealthy Miss Chaffery should even contemplate doing without her, or another's, services entirely.

Iris had only a few minutes with her father before he departed into the city to attend the dinner over which he presided annually as chairman of his board of directors. He was in his study, dressed, and looking through the typewritten sheets of his speech before

leaving the house, when his daughter appeared in the doorway, a lovely vision in white and silver, with a large mauve orchid worn on the left shoulder, accentuating the unusual pallor of her face. She was nervous, but the man, busy with the sheets of paper in his hand, did not notice that. In his opinion she was looking remarkably handsome.

"Can you spare me a few minutes before you go?" she asked.

"They will necessarily be very few," he answered. "I'm just off."

"It's about Nigel," she said, going direct for her point. "Father, he wanted to call and see you to tell you he could afford to marry now, and to ask your consent to——"

Mr. Chaffery interrupted her angrily.

"Don't keep me discussing that matter. I'm not interested in the fellow's prospects. He wouldn't trouble to ask my consent if he didn't realize that he can't afford to do without it. A fig he cares for my approval!"

"But I care," she said softly.

He scrutinized her attentively.

"If you did you would pay more heed to my wishes," he retorted. "That fellow is not any good, Iris. I've been making inquiries. He's one of the racketing sort. He owes more money than he'll ever make. He's not steady. You wait a bit. There's plenty of time for you."

"But, father dear," she said, "I love him. I want to marry him. Why are you so unkind? It's horrid

to feel you are against me. Nigel's all right. He'll steady down now. And he's obtained a good position with Farrar's. They are giving him a thousand a year."

"More fools they. He won't keep that job long. And you'll spend that on your clothes."

"Oh, no, I won't."

He eyed her grimly.

"You are expensive, Iris. You'll have to change a lot before you can be a poor man's wife."

"Why should I be the poor wife of any man?" she flashed back at him, with a light of anger in her eyes. "You've heaps of money. Why can't you give me some of it and let me go to my husband with my head up?"

"I will, if I approve of the man you marry."

"You approve! You'll never approve of anyone I like. Your friends are all stodgy."

"Very well," he said curtly. "That's enough for to-night. Don't make me late."

She stood aside to let him pass.

"Perhaps one day you will regret," she said quietly, "that you wouldn't listen to me patiently on a matter which is of the deepest importance to me. Go to your dinner. I only wish my mother were alive to-night."

She turned her back on him and walked quickly away, her small head carried high, the set of her mouth mutinous, determined, giving a very correct idea of her intentions. She would take her life into her own hands and live it as she chose.

He looked after her in indecision, a little taken

aback by her attitude and by what she had said. Would it have made a difference had her mother been alive? Possibly it would. She had been a wise and a sweet woman. He put the thought from him, and a little angrily made his way out to the waiting motor-car.

His enjoyment for the evening was spoilt. Usually this annual dinner was a pleasant function for him. The men who attended it were for the greater part his friends, and understood and appreciated him. And now came Iris, with her own affairs, her own interests, intruding upon the harmony of the arrangements, upsetting things. Eventually she would, so he reflected, come into line and submit to his rule, if only because this rule, if autocratic, was just and considerate of the welfare of those within his jurisdiction. He loved her, but as a man loves what he controls and has authority over. In straining against his authority she incurred his ill-will.

He thought of her continually after parting from her. He regretted their estrangement and her anger against him. He held Hennelly blameworthy for these distresses, and disliked him the more on this account. The man stood as a menace between him and his daughter, between him and authority, between him and the fulfilment of his life's work. It was unthinkable that a man like Hennelly should come between him and the successful issue of his plans. He had made a great position for himself, had built up fortune, won respect, made a place for himself in the great world of industry by brain and perseverance. He had

done all this unaided. If only he had a son to carry on, he reflected resentfully, thinking of his daughter, of how she was failing him, life would have a zest, a keener interest. Had Iris given him a son-in-law whom he might have taken into his office, given a place of trust and of responsibility, he would have been satisfied; instead she was letting him down, going against him, introducing into the family a man he would never acknowledge.

He was jealous of the importance of these things which he had built up unaided, jealous of his own prestige. He was incensed against his daughter because she failed to appreciate the significance of these things which to him stood for so much. She was careless of the heritage he was eager to bequeath her. These things which mattered to him, mattered intensely, she treated with an indifference that was disheartening, an indifference that was almost levity. It was the fashion of the age to regard the world as though it was made for one. Young people took all that offered; they did not think of the necessity to earn, or that someone must have toiled to bring about these pleasurable conditions; they accepted the conditions and looked no deeper.

The man who had won out of nothing a place of respect and importance felt hurt to know how little his effort was appreciated by the one whom it most deeply affected; and whose benefit therefrom should be, he decided, proportionate to her desert.

He started out to his dinner in a mood of intense irritation.

Iris, angry also, returned to the drawing-room and stood under the picture of her mother, who had died when she was a little thing, and whom she remembered dimly as someone gay and sweet who had played with her and petted her, and made home more homelike than she had found it since. If only her mother had been alive she felt sure she would have sided with her and championed Nigel's cause, because she was a woman and would have understood.

"Money isn't everything," she said, half aloud, and looked around the handsome room and down at her own expensive clothes with curious dissatisfaction.

It wasn't ; but the absence of it was going to make life very much less pleasant for her, she believed.

She went upstairs to her room, where her maid was in readiness with her cloak, which she put round her shoulders.

Iris lingered on the threshold before going out.

"You needn't sit up for me," she said.

The maid protested against this order, but her mistress's manner was imperative.

"No ; do not sit up."

She looked back to smile kindly upon a very useful and quite faithful attendant from whom she was parting reluctantly ; then she went downstairs and entered the waiting taxicab.

The maid remained standing before the long swing mirror in the bedroom, and met the puzzled eyes which stared out of the mirror into her own with no answer to their question. She felt increasingly suspicious. Strange things were happening. She did not remember



ever having been ordered not to sit up during her several years of service in that house.

Another odd link in the chain of unusual circumstances was that Iris had ordered a taxi instead of allowing her father's chauffeur to drive her to her destination. That fact was commented on later, but it escaped particular notice at the time.

## X

MR. CHAFFERY returned from his banquet and retired to bed in ignorance of his daughter's departure from the house. He had dined well, too well; as a result he slept ill and descended on the following morning in a mood of irritability and with unpleasant symptoms, which he described in his thoughts as thick head. He felt disinclined to go to the city, and was even less inclined towards breakfast. He made a pretence of eating, and was not altogether sorry that his daughter was not present to comment on his lack of appetite. Her absence from the breakfast table he attributed to what he termed the sulks.

He experienced a faint surprise when, having risen from the table and gone out into the hall, she still did not put in an appearance. She was usually about when he was ready to leave the house in the morning.

He made inquiries, which to his utter amazement elicited the information that she was not in the house; that she had driven away on the previous evening in a taxicab and had not returned. In the opinion of her maid, who professed otherwise entire ignorance of her arrangements, she had not intended to return that night.

Mr. Chaffery sent for the maid, and disbelieving in her ignorance of Iris's movements, behaved so violently

and was so abusive in manner, that the maid, being French, retaliated in kind, and finally went into hysterics.

Eventually the butler and Mr. Chaffery's valet between them removed the maid, who was given into the care of the women members of the household, and assisted Mr. Chaffery to bed. It was evident that Mr. Chaffery had had some sort of seizure. The butler telephoned for the doctor, observing to the mystified housekeeper when he turned away from the instrument that people should not work themselves up into such a state of excitement; if they did they must expect trouble.

Mr. Chaffery did not like doctors. He held the opinion that no healthy person required a doctor's attentions; when the need for medical supervision arose it showed decay of the fabric. He resented deeply having a doctor hanging over his pillow.

"There's nothing the matter with me," he said testily, "nothing whatever. I've been greatly annoyed this morning, and last night I attended a big dinner and overdid it. Indigestion. That's all."

The doctor, who had brought an odd-looking box with him, which he placed on a table beside Mr. Chaffery's bed, proceeded to squeeze Mr. Chaffery's arm in a kind of ligature which he tightened by means of a rubber valve arrangement. This at first interested Mr. Chaffery and subsequently exasperated him. It was altogether absurd. But the fellow must of course do something for his fee.

The doctor did a great many things. He took

amazing liberties with Mr. Chaffery's body. He wrote in a little book, and looked at Mr. Chaffery very intently.

"If you want to feel fit you'll have to do what I tell you," he said, with the manner of a man who did not feel very sanguine of being obeyed.

"What's that?" Mr. Chaffery inquired.

"My prescription is, take two whiskies to-day, one to-morrow, and none for the rest of your life."

When he finished speaking he and Mr. Chaffery appeared to be trying to outstare one another. Then Mr. Chaffery said curtly:

"What's the alternative?"

"You may die any moment of blood pressure."

The professional man was brief and emphatic. He had a difficult case to deal with, and he did not expect gratitude. Mr. Chaffery's response scarcely surprised him.

"Give me the blood pressure every time," he said.

The man of healing felt his features relax from their professional gravity. He had had obstinate and self-indulgent patients before but not one who was more frank'y outspoken.

"Well, I've warned you," he said.

"You're a fool," Mr. Chaffery retorted. "What's the use of life to me if I can't have my pleasures? I may as well be dead."

"You will do as you like, of course. The matter lies entirely in your own hands."

"In that case, I'll follow your prescription by having a whisky now," Mr. Chaffery said, and for the

first time since the doctor's arrival he looked almost pleasant.

He wasn't going to be dictated to by Harley Street as to what he should eat and drink. It wasn't a doctor he needed, but a lawyer. He had to find his daughter; and if, when she was found, he learned that she was married to that waster he would make an entirely new will. He would see that Hennelly should not touch a sixpence of his money.

It was perhaps as well that that fool of a doctor had come in and talked rot about sudden death; it reminded a man that no matter how healthy he might be, death might be stalking round a street corner and get him in the guise of a careless driver of some superfluous motor-car any moment of any day. A man ought to be prepared. He ought to have his house in order. No need to wait until you were dying to settle your affairs.

It proved a trying day for everyone in the Chaffery household who came within the influence of Mr. Chaffery's room. For the remainder of the day he stayed in bed, and, it seemed to the valet, amused himself with speaking over the telephone with the zest which some people would have employed in similar circumstances in wearing headphones and listening to wireless. He was continually ringing up the office; and he held interviews with his solicitors, with stock-brokers, with all manner of people whom in the ordinary way he would have interviewed in his office.

Later in the day his solicitor called and was shown into his bedroom. He was a nervous little man, with

a profound respect for Mr. Chaffery and an even greater admiration for him. Mr. Chaffery was not insensible of this; they appreciated and understood one another.

The lawyer, Grant, was shocked at being summoned to Mr. Chaffery's bedside for the purpose of making a will. It suggested that Mr. Chaffery might be anticipating immediate dissolution. That was not, he found on entering the room, Mr. Chaffery's attitude. His client had never seemed less inclined to regard himself in ill health than at the moment when physical incapacity kept him temporarily confined to the house. The lawyer was amazed to find him less ill, it appeared to him, than angry.

The big man in the bed fumed and raged; the little man seated at the bedside, with a table with everything upon it necessary to his purpose beside him, said and did any conceivable thing he believed likely to pacify him. His sympathy with Mr. Chaffery was strong. Mr. Chaffery, fluttering a crumpled sheet of notepaper in his shaking hand, attempted to explain the position, and, finding explanation difficult, thrust the note, which had arrived for him by the second post, into his perplexed listener's hand.

"Read it, Grant," he said. "That's from my girl. After all I've done for her. Flying in face of my authority. Defying me. What's come over the girls and boys of this generation I don't know. Pleasure. Their own wills. They're a jazz crowd. Spending money and dancing is all they care about."

Mr. Grant took the letter and scanned it slowly.



"My dear father," he read. "To relieve you from doubt as to my whereabouts I write this to say that I have gone to Nigel. We are crossing to France to-night, and intend getting married without delay. As you know, I love him, and I am of age, and prefer to live with him poor than live without him. I am only sorry you refused us your consent. Iris."

Mr. Grant put down the letter, took off his horn-rimmed glasses and wiped them.

"I can only say, Chaffery, that I'm extremely grieved about this for your sake. Such a course as your daughter has adopted strikes an unbiassed mind as decidedly lacking in duty. In my opinion her letter is a little callous. I do not know the man, but I would trust your judgment of men always. If you say he is no good, I don't doubt you have ample reason for believing the statement."

"He's a rotter," Mr. Chaffery said with heat. "A fortune-hunter. He believes that, however ill I take this marriage, I shall relent eventually, or at least that I shall feel compelled to leave my daughter something substantial in my will. He banks on that. I don't enjoy acting vindictively against my daughter, but I am resolved that as the wife of Nigel Hennelly she shall not touch a penny of my money. If he reduces her to poverty during my lifetime, as I believe he will do, she can return to my home; it will always be open to her. But during my lifetime, as after my death, Hennelly will not enjoy a farthing of my money. Do you call that vindictive, Grant?"

"I call it severe," Mr. Grant replied uneasily. "I have no doubt you have reason in what you say, and that your decision is just, if somewhat harsh."

"Justice is harsh," Mr. Chaffery returned. "It wouldn't be justice otherwise."

"No. Possibly that is so. Still, if he—if this man makes your daughter a good husband, you may perhaps modify your view later?"

"He won't," Mr. Chaffery said with grim certainty.

"He may not. Nevertheless, let us suppose for the sake of argument that he does. Would that make a difference?"

"It might," Mr. Chaffery answered. "But it is so extremely improbable that I don't think we need consider it even. If I am sufficiently impressed with his admirable qualities later on I may be moved to alter my will. For the present, you will draw it up as I wish. The man is out for my money, and he shan't touch a penny of it."

"And, in the event of your daughter having issue?" the lawyer suggested.

Mr. Chaffery thought awhile.

"I will provide substantially for their education and for their futures," he said presently. "But I will so tie up the money that their parents can't handle it. Also I will advance the age upon which they may inherit to twenty-five years."

The lawyer took out his fountain pen and examined the nib deliberately.

"I don't wish to appear to interfere, Chaffery," he said. "But can't you see your way to make some

provision, even if small, for your daughter? You could tie it up securely."

"Could I!" Mr. Chaffery's voice was hard. "She'd give it to that waster somehow. No, Grant; I am determined in this matter. As Nigel Hennelly's wife she shall never inherit a penny."

## XI

THE days which followed were days of unclouded happiness for Iris. This break-away from home, far from having any element of regret about it, seemed to open up a new life. The atmosphere was altogether more free. It was like leaving a sheltered house, all upholstered and mahogany furnished and stifling, and getting into the sunshine. She had flung back the shutters and the light was almost blinding. She stood bathed in it, with Nigel beside her ; two perfectly happy young people who had achieved their purpose and felt no regrets.

Nigel was confident that now their marriage was an accomplished fact which could not be undone by threats or other opposition, Mr. Chaffery would come round and view the matter sensibly. It was incredible that he could disinherit his only child simply for disobeying him in marrying the man she loved against his wishes.

There was nothing, as Hennelly was fond of asserting, that Mr. Chaffery had against him. His record was creditable ; he was now in a position to marry. As for his debts, these need not be considered ; he would pay them off eventually. Mr. Chaffery's belief that he was hoping for a fortune with his daughter was unjustifiable ; he would have wanted Iris if she had been the daughter of someone considerably less

important than Mr. Chaffery. At the same time it was but natural that both he and his wife hoped that some of Mr. Chaffery's money would find its way into their banking account. A little of it would have been useful on the present occasion ; a honeymoon is shorn of its glory when economy has to be studied. Making do was all very well in theory, put into practice it lost its poetry.

Difficulties had arisen from the start. They had travelled naturally first class ; but Iris had wanted a private cabin on the boat ; that cost twenty-five shillings extra ; and this twenty-five shillings instead of being merely twenty-five shillings in the ordinary way, represented so many shillings less to spend. It was absurd, but it was also annoying.

Further difficulty had arisen in the selection of an hotel. Iris wished to stay in the Champs Elysées at Claridges. She always stayed there when accompanying her father. Claridges was prohibitive, Nigel contended, on account of the tariff ; it was altogether too expensive. There was no possibility of staying there save by running up an account in her father's name. This she declined to do ; so they went to an inexpensive hotel, and tried not to perceive any of its shortcomings. It was not so luxurious, as Nigel said, but still very comfortable.

And the business of getting married was quite interesting, even amusing, and a little complicated. There followed days of deep and wonderful happiness, during which the simpler side of Iris's nature came to the surface. Her soul craved for the beauties of nature,

for the silence and solitude of unfrequented ways ; the remote peace of woods and blue skies and the quiet byways of country villages.

They quitted Paris and toured the country-side, staying at primitive farm-houses, at quaint wayside inns where they entered gaily into the lives of the people. Iris talked French fluently, and her dark winsome beauty, coupled with Nigel's handsome presence, won all hearts. They were a fine couple ; and the handsome clothes of madame proclaimed her of the noblesse. The French peasant, in whom the love of romance is inherent, scented a runaway match and made their sympathy apparent.

It was an ideal honeymoon, all too brief ; but the warm glow of those days lived in Iris's memory throughout the long after years. She returned from the fair beauty of the French countryside to London, and an inexpensive flat in South Kensington, and one quite efficient servant, who cooked and " did " for them and slept out.

The poetry fell away from things surprisingly.

Nigel was away all day in the city. He left and returned to the flat each day with the regularity to which her father's habits had accustomed her. But somehow it seemed different. And it was always a scramble to get him away in time. He hadn't her father's habit of punctuality. There was a lack of order in their universe.

Their evenings were spent very much as they had been formerly ; and the consequent late hours disinclined Nigel for early rising. He went to his office



as it were under protest. And the days dragged rather for Iris. The flat occupied little of her time. At home there had been more to engage her attention, more to interest her. And when time had hung there had been always a motor-car at her disposal, and places to go to, things to see and buy. She could not afford to lead the expensive life she had led hitherto, and as a result she gradually got out of touch with former friends. Slowly she was dropping out of things, falling back as it were and taking her place in another line.

The thing was too imperceptible to make its effect felt speedily, but by degrees the change forced itself on her notice and chilled her.

She rebelled against the necessity for economy. Not to be able to have anything which the impulse of the moment prompted was positive hardship. And it was manifestly clear that the value of money was unknown to her, something she failed to grasp because the source hitherto had been unfailing.

She wrote to her father immediately on her return to London and begged him to come and see her, or to write and appoint a day when he would receive her. But there was no response to her letter, and when she called at the house she was not admitted. Mr. Chaffery was not a man to depart from his word.

"Miserable old blighter!" Hennelly exclaimed, when his wife returned from her fruitless visit. "Don't you worry. He can go to hell, so far as I'm concerned."

"He's my father," she said, and the first tears he had ever seen her shed welled in her eyes.

"Don't take it to heart, Iris. He will probably come round later. Give him time to get used to the idea."

Nigel took his wife out to the theatre with an idea of comforting her. Afterwards they had a late supper, and, meeting friends, made up a party and went on to a night club. The dawn was breaking when they reached the flat.

"And I've got to be at the office by nine o'clock," Nigel grumbled, as he opened the door with his latch-key and turned to close and bolt it.

"But we've had a lovely time," she said, her eyes bright, tireless, smiling. The trouble of the afternoon had faded completely.

"Topping."

He took her in his arms and kissed her, while she clung to him in happy contentment. No one made love as Nigel made love, no one kissed as he kissed; no arm had ever held her with that same protective strength which seemed part of his nature, the virile, self-reliant nature which had first won her admiration before ever she had dreamed of loving him. She was immensely proud of her husband as well as very deeply in love with him. His caresses still brought a warm flush to her face, a sweet shyness into her eyes. Her love was softening Iris. It was this new quality of gentleness in her which made the break with her father a source of real regret. She would have done anything in her power to win his forgiveness; the estrangement between them troubled her.

It troubled Hennelly for reasons other than senti-

mental ; but he still held firmly to the belief that Mr. Chaffery would eventually relent.

That this belief was justified and that Mr. Chaffery was already relenting he felt assured when one day there arrived at the flat a large crate, preceded by a letter from Mr. Chaffery preparing his daughter for its arrival. He was sending her, he wrote, four valuable pictures, for which she could obtain at any time she chose to sell them their present market value, which he estimated as about ten thousand pounds, for which sum the pictures were insured. He had paid the insurance up to date, and furthermore undertook this expense in the future, adding a postscript to the effect that he did not suppose this expense of insuring valuable pictures which had passed from his possession to hers would be his for long, since she was likely to realize on them speedily from matters of expediency.

The postscript vexed Iris.

"What did I tell you? The old boy *is* coming round," Nigel exclaimed exultantly.

But Iris was still worrying over the postscript.

"That is an insult aimed at you," she said. "We won't part with those pictures, Nigel, anyhow."

"Well, I don't know. Ten thousand pounds is rather a nice sum to handle, old thing."

"If only we can manage without selling," she said, and smiled at him a little wistfully. "He'll be so triumphant if we sell. Don't you see, it would be like owning myself beaten? I'd hate him to think we were hard up."

"But we aren't," Nigel asserted.

“ He’s trying us,” she said, and looked at the letter thoughtfully. “ He wants to be in the position to say, ‘ I knew it. What can you expect ? ’ If we sold he would lay full responsibility for the act at your door. He would be glad. Whatever happens we must hang on to those pictures. I feel they are my inheritance. If we part with them all chance of reconciliation goes.”

“ Rot ! ” Nigel said uneasily.

It was evident that what she said impressed him with a sense of its possible truth.

## XII

A ROUND of gaiety followed the return from the honeymoon. In Iris's circle she was still an enchanted figure; to the glamour of great wealth and the power of beauty was added the charm of romance which is associated with a runaway marriage. The touch of the unusual which distinguished this wedding from the ordinary social affair, gripped the popular imagination; and for a period the young people were fêted and lionized. Nigel had always been a favourite. There were many girls who envied Iris. He was liked too by his own sex, particularly by older men, Mr. Chaffery being an exception. General Mellor, who thought very highly of him, received the information of the runaway marriage with a laugh. It was characteristic of Hennelly; old Chaffery was no sport or he would see the humour of the thing and give them his blessing. That was how he viewed the matter. He considered that Chaffery ought to come down handsomely. But Mr. Chaffery did nothing of the sort. It did not disturb him that people thought him mean and unnecessarily harsh.

Lady Mary Mellor gave a big dinner party for the young people, and launched them happily upon a round of fêting. These courtesies demanded some return: the Hennellys made this in the form of a

dance at a West End hotel and a supper for which a private room was engaged. It was expensive ; but, as Hennelly urged, it paid off the score in the easiest way.

The hotel was accommodating. Hennelly ran up an account. It was not a very convenient time to pay immediately after his wedding ; he would settle that little matter later when other expenses were not so pressing. Since he had married the daughter of the well-known Mr. Chaffery he found that many people were willing to give him credit. This pleased him. There was a sense of power, a feeling of superiority in this general acceptance of his position of security. His credit was all right whatever his bank balance might be. That the day of reckoning must arrive however long one staved it off, was a fact which did not for the present disturb him. Always at the back of his mind the belief held that his father-in-law would come round.

In any case there were the pictures if everything else failed.

Hennelly was inclined to look on the pictures as so much capital. So in a sense did Iris. If she wanted anything which she felt was extravagant, instead of practising self-denial, she comforted herself with the reflection that she could sell a picture at any time she needed money.

The sale of the pictures would be only a last resource. She was resolved not to part with them if she could help it. This gift from her father was, she firmly believed, a trap. It was intended to be a temptation



and not a source of satisfaction. In this purpose the giver had succeeded only too well ; the knowledge that at any time this large sum of money could be raised was a temptation to both of them ; it led them to disregard the economy they might otherwise have practised.

“ In your place, I’d sell the lot,” Hennelly observed on an occasion when he stood before the pictures, which the man who had superintended their removal from their late quarters to their present home had hung to his own dissatisfaction, two in the small, ill-lighted entrance hall, and two in the almost equally unsuitable sitting-room. “ And I would tell your father that you did so as you considered the money altogether more suitable to people in our position. It was a fool of a present to give you. What do we want with these depressing daubs, which are valuable only because the men who painted them have been dead umpteen years ? ”

“ Nigel ! How can you talk like that ? ”

Iris’s taste was cultivated to appreciate what was good. She had grown up surrounded with these things ; her education had developed a natural instinct for beauty and form and colour. To hear Nigel talk of a Vandyck, a Rembrandt, a Hoppner, as daubs, disturbed her sensitiveness as greatly as if she had heard him unconsciously drop his aspirates. The only picture he expressed any liking for was a Watteau on account of its lighter treatment and brighter tones.

The pictures would have been a joy to Iris had other things been equal ; as it was they proved a source of

exasperation. They represented, she felt, her inheritance. She had a strong persuasion that her attitude in regard to them would resolve her ultimate relations with her father. He was giving them, more particularly Nigel, a chance to show the stuff they were made of. If they afforded him the satisfaction of proving his prediction correct their cause would be damned finally. She was resolved he should never be in a position to speak slightly of her husband, or of her incapacity to adapt herself to conditions she had of her own volition accepted in defiance of his advice. At all costs she must keep the pictures. It was a touch of his own obstinate egotism in her which made this a matter of supreme importance.

She discussed the subject at some length with Mona Anstruther, when the latter came one afternoon to tea with her at the flat. Mona had no particular reverence for old masters ; her attitude towards the pictures was the same as Nigel's ; she advocated selling this white elephant of a wedding present.

"One could buy a number of lovely things with ten thousand pounds," she observed.

"I have a sort of conviction," Iris explained, "that it is policy to hold on to my pictures. To sell them is exactly what father expects me to do. I don't want to give him that pull over me."

"M'm!" Mona looked doubtful. "I don't think your pater will hold out much longer. And he's bound to leave you something substantial in his will, whatever his present attitude may be. If I were in your place, I would call regularly on him, once a week, on

Sundays, until he received me ; then I would tell him what I thought of him, and eventually I would extend my forgiveness."

Iris laughed.

" Which proves very clearly you have no knowledge of my parent's disposition," she said. " He's never in the wrong ; and it isn't wise to attempt to prove him so."

" And yet you are attempting it."

" You mean in clinging to my pictures ? It will prove him mistaken in his deduction. But it will be an amazing triumph for me—if I succeed."

To Mona this ambition was incomprehensible. It occurred to her as little short of tragedy that Iris, with a millionaire for a father, should be hard up.

" I think it is disgusting the way he is treating you," she exclaimed in a burst of indignation. " I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't cap it all by marrying again."

Iris broke into a peal of merriment.

" That would put the lid on," she said. " There isn't the slightest fear of that though. He never speaks to a woman, except to the stodgy wives of his stodgy friends. There is none of that silliness about him."

" How can you be positive ? Besides, now you are out of the way he will be exposed to greater temptation. There are plenty of people who will run after him."

" They may run," Iris said with conviction ; " they won't catch him."

Hennelly returned home. They heard his latch-key turn in the lock and his swift movement in the

passage without. He came into the room in his breezy confident fashion, greeted the visitor, and smiled upon his wife. He carried a bunch of irises which he dropped into her lap.

"How lovely, Nigel!" She dipped her face among their delicate petals. "I'll wear some of these to-night."

Nigel grinned at Mona.

"Been viewing the heirlooms?" he inquired.

She nodded.

"I'm all with you, Nigel. If they were mine, I would run round to the dealers first thing in the morning."

"I hope you have persuaded Iris," he said.

Mona gave an expressive shrug.

"She's a Chaffery," she said.

"God forbid!" he murmured fervently.

Iris laughed.

"Let's have a cocktail before we go any further," he suggested. "Then we'll toss what's to be done about the inheritance."

He busied himself fetching things and mixing the drinks.

"I met Renshaw in Newgate Street to-day," he remarked, handing round the glasses. "Quite the right setting for him. He says your undutiful conduct has broken the old man up. He's been seedy."

"Father!" Iris ejaculated. She betrayed greater astonishment than concern; her tone sounded incredulous. "How did Mark know?"

"I didn't think of asking. The thought which

occurred to me was that it would be quite a good idea to call with tender inquiries."

"I don't believe he is ill," Iris asserted.

"Has been," Hennelly corrected. "According to Mark, he is convalescent and back in the City."

"Yes, I know," Mr. Chaffery's daughter returned unmoved, sipping her cocktail. "An outburst of violence, and too many whiskies. That's about the only illness he's had. The symptoms have seized him before."

Hennelly surveyed his wife with tolerant amusement.

"Nice sympathetic soul, aren't you?" he said, and leaned down and kissed the lovely scornful lips.

### XIII

IT was some time later that Iris met Mark Renshaw. Besides being a busy man he had no liking for social functions, and seldom went to parties. They met at the Anstruthers for the first time since her marriage, which appeared to her then as quite remote ; they had returned from the honeymoon two months earlier. She reproached him gently for his negligence.

" You haven't been to see me, Mark. That's not quite kind."

Renshaw laughed pleasantly. He squeezed her hand.

" Why haven't you called ? "

" Oh ! for several reasons. We won't waste time by going into them. How's life using you ? Agreeably, I should say, judging from your looks."

" Yes. Life's lovely. I'm having a wonderful time."

" No regrets ? " he asked, and scrutinized her closely.

" No regrets. Well, perhaps one. I'd prefer to have my parent on my side instead of against me."

" Naturally you would. I think he feels rather that way himself."

" And he won't give in ! " Iris said. " Funny thing, obstinacy, isn't it ? When you are up against



it, it's like pushing against a stone wall; there's no give anywhere. And I hear he has been seedy. Is he all right again?"

"I don't see him often," Renshaw replied. "We don't come much in touch at any time. The last occasion was at least a month ago. He didn't look quite himself then, I thought. Ageing a bit. A little puffy and less robust. But he is still a power in the City."

"Yes." Chaffery's daughter looked reflectively upon the crowd thronging Mona's rooms; a tiny pucker knitted the usually smooth brow. "He will always be a power in the City. I think that is what has hardened him. He loves power."

"And you wouldn't come to heel. Too much of his nature in you, I expect."

"Should you describe it like that?" She glanced at him quickly. "Would you give up the woman you loved at anyone's bidding?"

Renshaw smiled down at her.

"Only at her own," he answered.

"Then you do think I was right?"

"I suppose you were," he admitted.

"Aren't you sure of it?"

"Yes. Providing——"

"Providing?" she prompted him.

"Really, this is rather like the catechism." The smile on his face broadened. "I refuse to answer any more questions. I'm going to ask a few for a change. How does Nigel like his job?"

"So-so. It ties him, and that's a bore. But it's a

cushy job. The Mellors have been awfully good to us both. Nigel is a kind of pet boy with the general, and Lady Mary adores him."

"And where do you come in?"

"On the side of the general, I suppose. I think he rather likes me."

"It sounds incredible; but nothing surprises me. It is some compensation for advancing years that a man no longer young may adore your women with impunity. It's something for me to look forward to."

"You'll do your adoring before then, Mark," she said.

"Old thing, I've done it. I've not reached the age of thirty with a heart comfortably intact, believe me. I've been through it all right."

"Poor old Mark!"

She patted his hand. He did not know whether she had any idea that she was the object of his affection; he had never told her so. He had no thought of telling her then. But, as he knew, women have wonderful intuition, especially in matters of the heart. He patted her hand in response.

"These things help to form the character," he said. "If life went always as we would have it, it would lose its zest. You've had your struggles. Doesn't it make it all worth while?—that sense of pitting your strength against things. I love a fight, don't you?"

"I don't know." She became thoughtful. "I don't think I've ever considered that question. Besides, the fight has been forced upon me."

"You'd never enjoy swimming with the tide when once you had breasted the current," he said.

"Mark, you've an odd way of expressing things ; but there's a lot of truth in what you say. I'm not giving up anyway. I married for love ; and the course of true love never yet ran smoothly. But it's rather rotten when one reflects that it might run so very comfortably if father hadn't put a drag on the wheel."

"Oh ! well, you don't wish to be pushed around in a perambulator all your days. I am coming to call soon, if I may. I'm rather curious to see you in your own home."

"I've felt a little hurt that you haven't been before," she replied.

"I didn't want to swell the crowd," he said. "Confess, you've been too occupied even to notice the omission ?"

Iris laughed.

"I noticed it. I thought perhaps you were taking sides with father."

"I rather sympathize with his point of view ; but I am not for wearing the willow quite so openly as that," he replied. "It seemed to me somewhat intrusive to push in before the honeymoon was well over."

"Oh ! that's quite a thing of the past," she returned. "We never lost our heads over that."

"I'm relieved to know you retained something. You seem to have lost quite a lot," he said.

She nodded, with the hint of hidden laughter in her dark eyes which he loved to see.

"We have. But it was worth it. Think of the romance, Mark !"

"Yes. You appear to have had quite a good run for your money. You set all London talking. The newsheets flamed with headlines. I shouldn't wonder if it doesn't establish the fashion in elopements. It solves the parental problem of wedding expenses. Only you miss the presents."

"Father sent one," Iris informed him. "Pictures. You must come and see. They used to hang in my sitting-room at home. They're good."

"They would be. Mr. Chaffery's collection is well known. That is the preliminary to his blessing, I imagine."

"Nigel thinks so. I don't. Father believes we will raise money on them when we are hard up. I'm not going to give him the satisfaction of proving himself right, if I can help it."

"I wouldn't either. That's another fight you're putting up."

"According to you, I am aggressive?"

Renshaw met the gaze of the mischievous eyes squarely. He thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful as she looked then; beautiful and womanly.

"According to me, you are the complete angler," he returned. "You won't get a bite from me."

"Not if I jerk on the line a bit? I always thought we were quite good pals."

"You labour under a few delusions, don't you?"

"But you like me—just a little?" she persisted.

"At least I do not dislike you," he replied. "In view of your marriage that should suffice. I'm not out to quarrel with Nigel; he's a bigger man than I am."

"Cautious old dear ! But Nigel's a very peace-loving citizen. His motto is, Enjoy life, and let others enjoy it."

"Is that what brings him to a show of this kind ?" he inquired.

"You are bored ?" she said.

"Not while I'm tucked away in a corner with you. But I hate crowds, except at a football match. Why must people pack their rooms when they give a party ?"

"In order to spread principles of democracy. If you don't learn to love your kind when you are privileged to rub elbows, it's proof that socialism is not for you."

"I'm an individualist," he rejoined. "Parties don't interest me." He looked up with a quick frown, and added in tones of exasperation: "Here's our hostess with the monied person from Chicago bearing down on us. I see it in her eye that she is bent on disturbing our privacy. Why does she drag him in tow ?"

Iris, who knew all about the man from Chicago, explained him hurriedly to her companion.

"He is buying up bits of England, and incidentally pictures," she said. "Mona thinks she is helping me to sell my wedding present."

"You won't ?" he urged.

"Not on your life ! What do you take me for ?"

"Good !" There was a note of satisfaction in his tone. "We aren't hauling down the flag yet."

He rose. Mona, with the man from Chicago, who was called Lowitz, halted in front of them with the

evident purpose, as Renshaw put it, of changing the guard. His eyes reproached her mutely for the intrusion. She ignored these distress signals, and engaged him in talk while Lowitz appropriated his place.

"Mrs. Hennelly," Lowitz said, with eyes of admiration for her surprising loveliness, "I am a sincere lover of all that is beautiful. And in England there is so much beauty; one sees it everywhere. I've a feeling I want to take it all back with me."

"You are a collector?" she said.

"I guess Mrs. Anstruther has told you that. She knows I'm keen on buying anything of worth I can pick up. You have the goods over here all right."

"She told me you were interested in pictures," Iris said.

He turned to her quickly.

"That is so. I understand you yourself possess some very fine pictures. It would interest me to see them."

"They are not for sale," she hastened to assure him. "My pictures are from my old home, and are my father's wedding present to me. I shall be happy to show them to you."

"That's very kind of you."

Renshaw, his attention not so wholly engrossed with Mona that he failed to catch snatches of the conversation, heard Lowitz tie her down to a date. It was the sort of thing he would do. No missing of opportunities for him. He felt quite unreasonably incensed with the man.

Mona slipped a hand in his arm and drew him aside.



"I've been looking for you, Mark. There are some nice girls I want you to talk to."

"I was doing that when you interrupted me," he remonstrated.

"I know. But you can see Iris any time. Besides, she is married."

"I don't know why you need always remind me of a disagreeable fact," he complained, as he prepared to accompany her. "As for the nice girls—what's wrong with my talking to you? You and Iris are the nicest people in the room."

"Of course we are. But we are beyond solving your problem for you."

"No woman can do that," he replied. "You make problems, you don't solve them."

"Some girl will, for you, some day," she said.

"You believe because you are married everyone who hasn't achieved that state must be unsettled. That's a very mistaken idea. The married state is more unsettling than the single life."

"I've experimented in both," she said. "You haven't."

"That's true," he allowed; and added: "I wonder what Anstruther's attitude in regard to the subject is?"

He felt unaccountably displeased with her and with his surroundings. He was conscious also of a vexed surprise at his own ill-humour. He was crying for the moon; and the moon sailed above him serenely unconscious, and shed the cold luminance of its indifference upon his path.

"I don't think I am in a sufficiently happy vein to create a good impression on any nice girl," he ventured.

Mona smiled indulgently.

"Nice girls are seldom impressed," she retorted. "They are filled with a large tolerance for masculine weaknesses."

"I am beginning to believe," he returned gravely, "that you are more imperfect than I had supposed."

She laughed brightly.

"I know you are upset with me for interrupting you in the indulgence of a dangerous practice which is so commonplace I wonder you do it," she said. "Mr. Lowitz sails in a week's time; and I was particularly desirous of giving Iris a chance of meeting him."

"A chance to sell her birthright for a mess of pottage," he said. "She won't."

"You think not?" She regarded him reflectively for a space; then she said: "It all depends upon the strength of Nigel's influence."

#### XIV

MR. LOWITZ called at the flat in Kensington on the following day. He expressed great admiration for the pictures, which he wished to buy outright. He was sufficiently up in his subject to appreciate the value of these works ; and when Iris mentioned the figures for which they were insured he knew that they would command yet higher prices if sold by public auction. Two of the pictures, the Vandyck and the Rembrandt, he was particularly anxious to purchase ; but Iris's refusal to part with them was too decided for him to doubt her sincerity. It was quite clear she had no wish to sell.

It was equally clear that her husband did not share her reluctance. He added his persuasions to those of Lowitz ; but Iris remained firm in her refusal, despite the temptation of Lowitz' offer, which was considerable. He was wealthy ; and in the gratifying of his wishes he was not mean. Moreover, he admired the owner of the pictures as greatly as he admired the pictures themselves. It afforded him pleasure simply to look at her.

" I can appreciate your husband's indifference to works of art," he said. " He has in his possession a finer picture than ever was painted. When one reflects upon the matter one cannot help thinking that the

tenth commandment is a little difficult always to observe. These old laws are interesting, but if nobody broke them they would lose their significance. I calculate to get my own way on most occasions, Mrs. Hennelly; but I have to give in to you this time."

"I'm sorry to be disappointing." Iris's smile had the pleasing effect for him of a break through of the sun; it irradiated brightness, he thought. "But I never led you to believe that my pictures were for sale, did I?"

"No. Mrs. Anstruther did, though. She told me your husband wanted to sell."

"But they are not his," Iris rejoined. "I would not part with them unless we urgently needed the money."

"That doesn't sound very hopeful for my chances of securing them," Lowitz observed, and looked about him with an appraising eye which noted the many luxuries with which the daughter of Mr. Chaffery had surrounded herself in her new home. "Say, if that time ever comes, remember my offer holds good."

Which was, Hennelly reflected, very decent of him.

"Upon my word, Iris, you did miss a good thing," he said, when their visitor had left. "I can't think what possessed you. Surely you could part with two of those pictures? They are wasted here; there isn't room for them. Your father would never know; there's no need to tell him what you do with them."

"But why part with them? We don't want the money."

"Oh, don't we? We should find it very useful."

"I know. But I have a feeling about those pictures. A sort of superstition. I don't want to sell—unless we must."

"We won't make a trouble about it, old dear." He kissed her, concealing his disappointment with an effort. "After all, you haven't burned your boats by turning his offer down."

With a knowledge of the debts which were steadily accumulating and the nightmare of big bills which would be presented in due course, which ultimately must be met, it seemed to him sheer folly to hang on to a few useless pictures and refuse the ease and relief from anxiety which this golden harvest offered. That the money would be dissipated speedily and the anxieties would accumulate afresh, were points which he chose to overlook; his imagination played with the pleasanter aspect of things.

It was characteristic of Nigel Hennelly to dwell on the agreeable side of life, to cold-shoulder everything which repelled him. He never admitted misfortune until it overtook him; nor was he easily overwhelmed when this happened, but looked about him for such relief as offered and seized it promptly. Light-hearted, shirking responsibility, he thrust behind him all the ugliness, the depressions, the jagged interruptions to the satisfactory march of life. Life ought to be jolly and the road under one's feet smooth. Anything which interfered with the even course of things he summed up in the one word, rotten.

It was rotten to be obliged to sit so many hours daily in an office; it was rotten to be compelled to

study economy, to be faced with the necessity for practising self-denial. It was particularly rotten to be unable to have things one wanted urgently. When the want was very urgent discretion was usually set aside.

For instance, when travelling to and from the City became a nuisance, an expensive nuisance if undertaken by taxi, an exasperation when buses and tubes were the means of transport, Nigel decided that he must have a car. A car was cheaper in the long run. He would drive it himself. Its possession would enable them to dispense altogether with the hire of taxis. That would be a big save ; so he reasoned.

Iris shared this optimistic view. She wanted a car. She was accustomed to have one always at her disposal. Since it would not run to a chauffeur she intended to learn to drive. It would be convenient for getting about in the daytime when Nigel was away. She could drive him to the City, leave him, and fetch him later. It would be rather amusing.

Nigel, resisting the temptation to get an expensive car, bought a Morris Oxford. It was British anyhow ; that fact alone sent up its value. And it was new, one of the latest models. His pride rebelled against the purchase of a second-hand car ; someone's cast off, which its owner had knocked about and probably spoilt.

The new car had to be garaged and cleaned and periodically overhauled. It all added to the expense of upkeep. But that was a trifle, and went against the hire for taxi-cabs. And later, when he got a holiday,



they would travel by road ; that would save the train fare and be much jollier.

The possession of the car proved an immense satisfaction ; but it was less saving in the hire of taxi-cabs than Nigel had believed it would be. It was inconvenient to use the car at night. The difficulties of parking arose. This latter inconvenience, as well as the awkwardness of the hour at which Nigel had to leave in the mornings, prevented Iris from making such free use of it as she had hoped to do. Taxis were really more convenient when it was a matter of shopping, or making calls in the afternoon.

But the car was useful for week-end excursions and long runs ; and it saved Nigel the bother of having to run for tubes or buses, and thereby getting blown and irritable before the work of the day began. It was quite a good investment, although it did not fulfil all their expectations. It came to be regarded, as the taxi fares were regarded, as a necessary part of their annual expenditure.

It was not a lucky car, though that was entirely the fault of the driver. Nigel was careless ; not wilfully so ; but it seemed to him the business of the pedestrian to get out of the way of oncoming traffic ; he flew into needless rages when the foot traveller did not take this reasonable view of the rights of the road.

Turning into New Broad Street on one occasion he narrowly missed running down a man who chanced to be crossing the road. The man, who was stout and elderly, was proceeding at a pace which in the motorist's opinion was suicidal. The near front wing of Nigel's

car touching him, sent him reeling backward almost against the wheel of an oncoming 'bus. For one moment it seemed inevitable that the 'bus would go over him ; but its driver swerved in time to avoid a serious accident ; and the man righted himself without further mishap. But the incident jarred Hennelly's nerves.

" Good God ! " he cried, when he saw the man incline towards the 'bus.

When the 'bus passed on and he realized that nothing had happened he lost his temper.

" Do you fancy this is your garden path that you crawl along the road like an infirm snail ? " he demanded, leaning sideways from the car to hurl his question at the loiterer. To his horror he saw that the person he addressed was none other than his father-in-law.

He drew back his head sharply and drove on. Unfortunate, very. Had the old boy recognized him ? Yes, without question. He had surprised a flash of recognition in Mr. Chaffery's irate eyes.

" Damned road-hog ! I will not be called an infernal snail by you, or anyone," Mr. Chaffery had shouted after the disappearing motorist, before becoming aware that a considerate constable was holding up the traffic to prevent further accident.

" Unfortunate, very," Nigel kept repeating as he drove on.

## XV

**N**IGEL on his return home in the evening related the story of his encounter with her father to Iris, who, rather to his surprise and very much to his annoyance, laughed. The thing struck her as irresistibly funny.

"You possess a queer sense of humour," he observed irritably. "I fail to see where the joke comes in. It's rather heartless," he added, when she repeated the offence and laughed again. "I might have killed the old boy."

"But you didn't," she said, still unseasonably amused. "I wouldn't laugh if you had."

"I'm not so sure about that," he retorted. "Anyway, that episode isn't going to help us much."

"Nothing will do that," she rejoined. "You don't know my parent as I do. He prides himself on never forgetting or forgiving an injury."

"There's no help for him, then. So long as one prides oneself on a vice one is unable to recognize it for a vice. As for injury! I can't see that I've been guilty of injuring him."

"No. Still, you can't hold yourself responsible for your failure in that respect after this morning," she said, and went off into another peal of untimely merriment. "It isn't due to consideration on your

part that I am not rushed into the expense of an entirely new black outfit before my trousseau frocks are half worn. Poor old daddy ! I expect he's simply fuming."

"He did all that at the time. I left him using language for which anyone but Mr. Chaffery would have been run in. He's well known in New Broad Street ; and the constable on duty was conveniently deaf. I believe he recognized me."

"From what you tell me, I've no doubt about it," Iris said. "I'm afraid that's *the* very last nail in Hope's coffin. Well, it can't be helped. I'll call to-morrow and inquire how he is. He won't receive me, but it will be gratifying to him to hear of my filial attentions. He likes people to run about after him. They tumble over him in the office, and forestall his needs, his wishes almost. He likes it, poor darling !"

"What ironic fate made you his daughter and me his son-in-law ? " he asked, and, the clouds dispersing, joined with her in laughing at his own expense. "A grim jest of the gods, isn't it ? I think I'll go along to his office to-morrow and apologize for my regrettable carelessness."

"Better not. The carelessness won't have offended him half as much as your calling him names. You shouldn't abuse people when you nearly run them down."

"He abused me, like a pickpocket," he complained, and went away to change for the evening.

They were dining out, and going on to a dance. Neither of them cared to spend a quiet evening in the flat. Quiet evenings bored them. It was that sort

of thing which made for disaster in married life. They both held this idea. Life with them was a round of gaiety; meeting people, dancing, having fun. And spending week-ends in the country.

Invitations to join week-end house-parties were fairly numerous. In return for this hospitality they gave occasional parties at one of the big hotels. Nigel became a member of the Royal Automobile Club. It was convenient for entertaining. Iris considered it the nicest place in town for lunch parties. She entertained rather freely in this way. It was quite the simplest, and one of the pleasantest means of meeting friends.

For a time life flowed on in this agreeable fashion; and then came the pinch. Bills, long overdue, were presented with greater insistence and less politeness. Nigel was pressed for money. He became irritable and nervy. Iris, unable to grasp the fact that money was not an inexhaustible commodity, made no practical attempt at reform. She felt rather injured when he blamed her extravagance at the finish of an unpleasant scene one evening, and told her she must draw in, that they must live altogether more economically.

"We'll have to give up going out," he said. "It costs too much—in clothes, in entertaining, in—oh! all round. Look at these!" He flung a sheaf of bills on the table. "All yours—dresses, and other things. We can't afford it."

"Well, I must have clothes," she said.

"You've got them—heaps of them. But you are always buying new things. It's got to stop anyway.

Your extravagance and mine. I'm over my ears in debt. I'll be in the hands of moneylenders next, and God help us then ! ”

“ It doesn't seem to me that I spend a great deal,” Iris complained. “ I'm always going without things.”

“ Oh lord ! ” he cried. “ It's enough to drive a man to drink. If you weren't so obstinate you'd sell those blasted pictures. That would put us on our feet. But it's no good talking to you.”

He flung out of the room in anger.

Iris, left alone, stood in front of one of the pictures and stared at it with fixed intensity. Was she going to be beaten after all? Would she have to give in and sell, and thus afford her father the satisfaction of proving himself in the right as regarded their inability to live within their means? Hateful, to have to admit failure! That thought disturbed her far more than the feeling of necessity to part with the pictures. To part with the pictures was a wrench. There was something sordid in the necessity to sell treasures, things one wanted to keep, for their beauty and for the sentiment which clung to them, in order to settle debts. The idea repelled her. Still more galling was the reflection that her father would be gratified by her failure to adapt herself to her new conditions. She was not equipped with those qualities essential to a struggle with any of life's problems. She was soft, a failure, fashioned solely for the inglorious path of luxurious ease.

Nigel also would be implicated. Mr. Chaffery had called him a waster. He would consider this harsh



summary of his character vindicated. They were both failures. That was how he would see the matter. That in fact was how the thing stood.

A feeling of anger gripped her, anger against her father, not anger with herself, or with Nigel; whose burst of irritability had left her only with a sympathetic understanding of his exasperation, the frustrated feeling of being unable to cope with the situation. She felt immensely sorry for him. She had never seen him so upset; he was usually even tempered.

He came back into the room after the lapse of some minutes and walked up to her, put an arm about her and kissed her.

"Sorry, Iris!" he apologized. "I am ashamed of my loss of temper."

"Dear boy!" She stroked his cheek. "I understand."

He hugged her.

"You are the sweetest little wife in the world."

Peace reigned once more. But the matter of the unpaid bills remained unsolved. To refer again to the sale of the pictures would have seemed to Hennelly to revive the stresses of their disagreement. He had lost his temper and been forgiven, and that ended the matter so far as he was concerned.

But for Iris the thing did not end there. The longer she reflected on this burden of debt, which was beginning to weigh down her husband's spirit, the more clearly did she see that with the remedy in her power the responsibility for Nigel's happiness was hers. She could rid him of this load of care with the sacrifice only

of a little pride. Economy could not help them, save in decreasing the annual expenditure ; no amount of future economy could discharge those bills.

The pictures would have to go. Two of them. She would keep two.

She said nothing about this decision to Nigel. She wanted to surprise him.

In this softened mood, in which the desire to ease the strain for him overrode every other feeling, she sat down at her writing-table, on which stood a portrait of Nigel, handsome, confident, with the dawn of a smile in the indolent eyes, and, first looking at the pictured face and smiling lovingly at it, she then took up her fountain-pen and wrote a letter to Matthew P. Lowitz of Chicago.

## XVI

NIGEL knew nothing of the transaction between his wife and Lowitz until, returning one day from the City, he discovered a large crate in the hall, which waited until the agent who was responsible for the packing and shipment of the pictures called to fetch it.

Iris was out. He had to wait until her return for an explanation of these doings. But he noticed the absence of the pictures from their places on the wall and, reading the label on the case, he drew the only conclusion there was to draw, and stood, perplexed, and overwhelmed by an emotion of worshipful tenderness, such as had moved him often during his courtship of her but which had slipped a little into the background of late. In this mood of warm and softened affection Iris found him on her return. She came in, aglow with anticipation of his pleased surprise, to be met at the door, which was flung wide before her key was inserted in the lock even; she found herself caught up in eager welcoming arms, kissed, and hurried into the sitting-room, laughing, a little shy, happily self-conscious.

"You jewel!" he cried, and hugged her. "It seems rotten that you should be called on to ease the strain. Are you sure you won't regret this, Iris?"

"I still have two," she said, with a faintly wistful

glance towards the space where so recently one of the pictures had hung. "The flat is too small for them. They will look better hanging on the walls of the Lowitz mansion. The part that galls is father's triumph. That sticks always."

"He needn't know. Why should he? It isn't as though they will receive the publicity of an auction room. We don't propose to advertise the transaction in the newspapers."

"We don't. Mr. Lowitz may."

"Over there, perhaps. I think it is unlikely your father will learn anything about it. We'll keep our mouths shut and trust to luck. Better not mention the matter to Mona."

"M'm! No; I hadn't thought of that."

"After all, it's our business and no one else's," Nigel said comfortably.

"I feel rather," Iris said with disconcerting unexpectedness, "as though I had put my soul in pawn."

The abrupt cessation from worry, the sense of freedom that followed on the cancellation of those old debts which had pressed so embarrassingly, had a marked reactionary effect. Their outlook changed wonderfully. There was money in the bank; an endless supply it seemed to both these unbusinesslike, careless young people. They spent freely, with a reckless disregard for the amazing rapidity with which their capital dwindled. Iris, to whom the value of money remained, as it always had been for her, unknown, spent as if the sum received for the pictures represented income instead of principal, and Nigel was wilfully obtuse to

the swift diminution of the figures standing to their joint credit in the bank. When that came to an end something would turn up. In any case there were no debts. And there remained the two pictures. Lowitz had expressed his willingness to buy these whenever Iris was prepared to sell. There was value at the back of them. No need to cut the cloth too fine so long as the material was at hand.

The sale of the pictures took place in the second year of their marriage; before the following year was out the proceeds of the sale had shrunk to an insignificant sum, and the need for retrenchment looked them once more in the face. The warning went unheeded. It is easier to acquire the spendthrift habit than to check it.

Unforeseen difficulties arose in connection with the sale of the pictures; to Iris the deception she had practised in this respect became an increasing embarrassment. The annual matter of the insurance cropped up. It was Mr. Chaffery's custom to pay the premium, and to send an intimation of this transaction to his daughter. She had not given any thought to the insurance when deciding to suppress the sale. The thing worried her considerably. But Nigel treated it lightly. Mr. Chaffery's loss was inconsiderable.

"What odds!" he said. "He can well afford to lose that paltry sum. I don't see any need to put him wise about it."

"It hardly seems quite square," she said.

"If you are going to entertain scruples," he returned, "you won't be able to sustain the fiction that you are

keeping your end up. It really isn't worth troubling about. You'll only give the old man the laugh of us."

"I am not going to do that," she said with spirit. "But I wish this insurance question hadn't arisen. It doesn't seem quite square."

It was not quite square; but she let it pass.

That first deadening of her conscience was the beginning of a system of deceit which, like the insidious evil of a potent drug, drew her further and further within its influence; till finally she was too deeply involved to extricate herself.

Her action was governed wholly by a desire to disprove her father's belief that she would realize on the pictures promptly. She knew this was his confident expectation, that furthermore he anticipated that at some time or other she would appeal to him for financial assistance. Doubtless this was his hope. He would have liked to bring her to her knees. That was Chaffery's attitude towards anyone who disputed his authority. But his daughter had too much of his own nature in her to yield him this satisfaction. She understood him well enough to apprehend his purpose. He wanted to obtain the whip hand of their situation. Nothing would induce her to give him this advantage over them.

This feeling of resentment against her father acted as an anodyne for her pricking conscience; it did not harden to loss of affection. In a way, because of her understanding of him, she sympathized with his attitude. From his point of view it was hard to be crossed like this by his own daughter.



Each time when Iris went to the house, to be politely but firmly denied admission, instead of feeling annoyed, she left always with an indulgent smile for his weaknesses and a growing distress because of this unnecessary and futile estrangement. In some ways she admired her father, and because in others she despised him, she strove to keep his more estimable qualities in mind. On the whole he had been a kind father to her : their first disagreement was provoked by her marriage. His reason for disliking Nigel betrayed one of the small kinks in his nature which roused her contempt.

On Mr. Chaffery's butler, who had been in his service since Iris was a baby, devolved the unpleasant task of denying his former mistress admission to her old home. It hurt him equally, if not more, than it hurt her. In sympathy with his obvious distress, she treated the matter lightly.

"He'll come round one day," she would remark. "I'm sorry about it ; but I can't blame myself exactly. It's just unfortunate."

"Yes, madam," the butler would respond gravely. "Mr. Chaffery, I think, feels the separation as you do, madam. It will be a good day for everyone when he reconciles himself to circumstances."

That was the point. Mr. Chaffery lacked that breadth of outlook which leads to a recognition of the futility of striving against the inevitable. From behind an insurmountable barrier of false pride he judged his daughter, and found her failing in duty and respect towards him. Her husband had behaved with immense discourtesy.

These things mattered to Mr. Chaffery; they wounded his self-esteem. A man of larger mental quality would have failed to be moved by them. But the prick of these irritations festered in his mind and assumed disproportionate dimensions. As a result Iris was turned away from her old home and returned disappointed but unsurprised to the flat in Kensington.

## XVII

SUMMER came, and the Hennellys spent a week of Nigel's holiday at the Anstruthers' place in Hampshire.

Greenway Manor was situated on the banks of a river, and boating was a popular pastime with Mona's guests. Mona had filled the house with bright young people ; and these young people, to the amusement of the inhabitants generally, overran the village and completely roused it from the lotus-like apathy which prevailed during the greater part of the year. The bright young people woke things up.

One form of amusement was to dash through the narrow winding streets in the evenings after dinner at top speed in a succession of motor-cars, the leading car noisily clearing a passage for the rest. That no one was injured, not even a dog, was due to the caution displayed by the inhabitants and not to care on the part of the motorists, who, having woke up the village, returned exhilarated with the dash through the summer dusk and spent the rest of the night in dancing.

Mona had gathered together only those who were likely to harmonize one with the other and add to the success of her house-party. By a ruling of the hostess, the guests paired off each day, choice of partners having the sole restriction that husband and wife, divorced

for the period as Mona put it, must not indulge in each other's society. She had invited Mark Renshaw with a view to his being a companion for Iris ; but Renshaw, not caring for bright parties, had refused the invitation.

With boating and tennis in the daytime and dancing at night, the time passed rapidly. Iris saw little of Nigel, rather less than she cared about. Entering whole-heartedly into the spirit of things, he enjoyed himself to the top of his bent with the brightest and best-looking girls. His wife experienced a first twinge of jealousy in observing his happy acquiescence in Mona's arrangement. Nigel was the most popular man of the party. The girls competed frankly for his favour, and his partner of the day was envied by the rest. His marriage seemed to have altered little in respect of his popularity. He was good looking and good company ; and his manner conveyed always that the particular companion of the moment was the object of dearest interest to him. He played up admirably to the game of make-believe, and with his easy adaptability made a charming guest and a pleasant companion.

Anstruther, the bored and none too genial host, felt out of it. He was past the frivolous age, and his wife's friends were not always congenial. In his opinion the fun of her parties was always a little forced. People felt that gaiety was expected of them and acted in accordance with this belief. The noisy hilarity often jarred on him.

"Come along," he suggested to Iris on one occasion when the fun was wilder than usual. "Let us get

away from this racket. There's a quiet reach above the weir where we can laze. This sort of thing," he waved a hand towards a cheery group of rowdy young folk, "is too reminiscent of the schoolroom. Never cared for ragging. It always strikes me as undignified and un-English. Don't know what we're coming to. It's little short of a national calamity, this attempt to imitate the Bohemianism of other countries. We aren't fashioned for that sort of thing. It's like a circus of performing animals. The animals don't want to do tricks; it's not natural to them; but the force of circumstances drives them to it."

When he had separated her from the rest, and their boat glided lazily among the reeds fringing the river-bank, he lay back against the cushions and smiled up at her contentedly.

"The comfortable thing about you is that you don't want me to make love to you. Everyone is doing it. Common, I call it. Cheapens life. The standard of living cheap—while food's dear. Cheap and nasty, eh?"

Iris, trailing her fingers in the water, smiled back at him.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Do you think life's any different now from what it has always been? Old Adam and Eve, they started things. And Eve bothered about clothes. Down underneath the veneer of frivolity we are solid still."

"Some of us," he agreed.

Watching her, with a quiet enjoyment of her sparkling beauty, he wondered whether Nigel appreciated

fully his good fortune? It had occurred to him more than once since their arrival at Greenway that he was somewhat careless of his privileges. In his opinion this would have been otherwise had Chaffery's attitude towards his daughter's marriage not been what it was. Anstruther was possibly prejudiced in his judgment. His own wife flirted with Hennelly, had always done so. He sometimes entertained the belief that, had he not been first in the field, he would never have won Mona. Not a very comforting reflection for a man who was fond of his wife.

"Is human nature unchanging, I wonder?" he said presently, contemplating her beauty reflectively. "The desire of man for woman. . . . Has that always been the same? The eager competition of both sexes for the favour of the other. It's lack of serious occupation which makes this question of sex pre-eminent. Well, that's not going to last. For a number of people these values are altering. The big problem with the present generation is the right of self-expression as much as the right to live. It's quite a good problem and knocks the silliness out of a number of things."

Iris considered this.

"I never bother my head about problems. Life always seems terribly worth while to me," she said.

Anstruther nodded lazily.

"You're just at the start," he said, and added after a brief pause: "I suppose I am old-fashioned, but I can't find anything to urge against the Victorian attitude towards life. They understood home life anyway."

"Dull," she said; "they, and their home life too."



Father's Victorian. The war changed our outlook. The war taught us that life is short, is uncertain ; that we must seize our opportunities, make the most of our time. To each man his hour. That was the idea impressed on the general mind. We lived at a rush during those years. We've lived at a rush since. Those lessons are easier learned than forgotten."

" True ! " he said, and fell again into silence.

She referred to the war, which despite the passing years was never remote, as one might refer to something of recent date. Like a death in the family circle the war had made its gap in the national life. Anstruther lay back among the cushions and smoked reflectively while he stared at the sunlight piercing the green tracery of the trees overhanging the banks. The place, the companion of the hour, both were to his liking. He was in no hurry to return to the noisy crowd they had left at the landing stage. When eventually they did return they found the entire party indulging in water polo. The day was hot and the water inviting, and everyone save themselves was taking part in the game. The hilarious merriment was audible before they came within sight of the busy scene. As their boat shot round the bend a general shout of welcome went up. Nigel swam out to meet it.

" Come on, you two ! " he called to them, and hung on to the side of the boat. " You are shirking. If it wasn't that I should be called upon to foot the bill for a new outfit for my wife I'd upset the craft."

Iris smiled involuntarily. Whatever he might do in the future, he had not up to the present had to

buy her clothes. She splashed him with water, until he let go.

"We'll go up to the house and change," she called out.

"*You* can go and change, if you like," Anstruther said, as he assisted her to land. "This sort of thing isn't in my line."

"Oh! come too, there's a dear. It's rather fun." She tucked a hand in his arm. "We must keep pace with our generation."

"Impossible for me," he returned. "It's a generation of Peter Pans. They won't grow up. I was born older than some of these fellows."

He was thinking at the moment of Hennelly.

"It's good to be young," Hennelly's wife said.

"It's a lot better to be grown up, if you can contrive it, believe me," he replied.

## XVIII

THE Hennellys looked upon the week spent at Greenway Manor as an economy, admitting a margin for a little extra extravagance at the finish of the holiday, which they proposed to spend abroad. These calculations did not allow for losses at cards. Nigel played without luck, as he expressed it, and his losses were considerable. Losses at cards he maintained should not be taken into account when balancing one's expenditure, since what one lost in one month's play one made up on the next. It was wiser he found never to reckon these transactions separately.

"Why play?" Iris asked him.

A not unreasonable question in consideration that they danced until past midnight, and generally followed this up with romping in the corridors and sustained pillow-fights well into the small hours.

"Oh! one can't refuse very well. Anstruther likes a game; and there are only a few who will join. I play to make up a table," Hennelly answered.

"Goodness knows what time you come to bed," she exclaimed. "I haven't an idea."

"Oh, well! It's my holiday," he said.

Whereat she laughed, and remarked:

"You work so much harder at play than at anything else, don't you, old thing?"

They were in their bedroom when this duologue took place, dressing for dinner in hastily contrived fancy costumes. Nigel had wandered in from the dressing-room to the larger room to consult Iris in regard to the complicated affair of his get-up. His interest in this, and his critical concern for his general appearance, reminded Iris of Anstruther's remark that it was a generation of Peter Pans. But she loved Nigel's irresponsible youth, his happy temperament which saw the immediate present always as the moment of supreme importance. He flung himself into every movement with a zest, an eager anticipation of enjoyment, which helped towards its success. He was the life and soul of the party. Where Nigel was the fun never relaxed.

The costume he was wearing was supposed to represent a Sheik, and his make-up was in accord with the character. To the tan his complexion had acquired on the river was added a stain which turned his skin copper colour. Iris, delightful as Carmen, in her dark and splendid beauty, expressed amused appreciation at the transformation.

"It's quite a wonderful disguise," she said. "But you ought to have been a Norseman, or Tristram, or someone like that."

"I ought really to have been your Rom. You look fine."

He turned from the contemplation of his own reflection to admire his wife. A year earlier he would have done this in the first instance and considered his own appearance later. Familiarity, with Nigel, took the fine edge off the flavour of things.

"What made you pitch on Carmen?" he asked.

"I like her because she was a baggage. I'm going now to ogle all the men while you Sheik the girls." She struck a saucy attitude with her hands upon her hips.

"Don't forget I'm your Rom," he menaced her, "and possessed of a jealous disposition."

She flouted him, laughing.

"You are a Sheik of the desert, and no more to me than a sand-fly. I'm in the Carmen rôle, a-hunger for a lover—oh! any old lover. Someone just to be especially nice to me. I'd love to have someone fight a duel for my sake. The men haven't got any spirit these days. Pistols for two and coffee for one, seems to have gone out with the horse busses and snow at Christmas time and long skirts."

"That's the reason," Nigel said, grinning. "Long skirts were so intriguing. That was the age of mystery; this is the age of speculation; one always wonders what one will see next. Who's going to fight a duel for a hussie all legs and shingled head? She wouldn't even faint; she'd merely use lipstick."

"She'd tie up your wounds for you. Your girl in a faint wouldn't attend to your ebbing life-blood."

"She'd weep over a fellow's death anyhow," he said.

"Oh, I'll do that," Iris promised. "Though I won't wear weeds."

"Well, drape this burnous for me; we'll discuss my demise some other time."

They went down to dinner arm in arm, the handsomest couple among Mona's guests, and joined the

gay assemblage in the wide wainscoted hall. The Sheik was speedily surrounded, and a girl, with a sari about her slender figure and her face veiled, claimed him as her dinner partner. Iris looked after them reflectively, and was only recalled by someone offering her his arm. Her own partner, a little neglected, was waiting to take her into dinner.

It was a particularly hilarious meal. On the morrow the party was to break up; and it seemed as if the imminence of the impending separation excited everyone to a display of greater exuberance.

Dancing on the flagged terrace followed the dinner. The night was warm and still, with a full moon, which lit up the shadowy lawns and showed the river, like a silver path, winding below the grounds which sloped to the water's edge. A small boat, moored to the landing stage, rocked gently on the silvery water. Iris, wandering along the path with her dinner partner, paused to look down at the little boat, and the stretch of river, white in the light of the moon.

"It looks inviting," she said.

The man she addressed was not a member of the house party but was a neighbour of the Anstruthers'. He had been invited as an extra guest. It was the first occasion on which he had met Mrs. Hennelly, and his admiration of her was unbounded. If Iris had been serious when voicing a desire for excitement the response to her wish was ready to her hand. Carey had lost his head completely. He would have fought a duel or committed any other folly in return for her favour. At her words, he stepped into the little boat



which rocked beneath his weight, and held out a hand to her.

"Come! We'll slip away from the crowd. You look adorable standing there in the moonlight. There is something bewitching and provocative about you. Why do you hesitate? You aren't afraid, surely, to come with me?"

Afraid! She laughed at the suggestion. Her laugh, with its ring of defiance, the audacity of her dark eyes and of her pose, a conscious imitation of Carmen's, the beauty of the brilliant moon-splashed figure, intoxicated him. He stared up at her, waiting with eager hand outstretched.

"Then why do you hesitate, *carrissima*?" he said.

Iris put a hand into his and stepped into the rocking boat.

"It means cutting dances," she said.

"I haven't booked any," he rejoined, holding her until she took her seat.

"No! Well, mine are promised. The next to my husband."

"Ah!" he said, and settled to rowing.

He experienced a fierce joy in snatching her dances from her husband. Her beauty excited him. She was, he thought, the most beautiful woman in the world. He watched her while he rowed rapidly for some minutes; then he shipped the sculls, and narrowly escaped overturning the tiny craft in a swift clumsy movement towards an embrace.

Iris, an expert swimmer, felt no fear of the water; but it occurred to her that her companion was perhaps

a little drunk, and she had no wish for his caresses, notwithstanding her laughing boast to Nigel earlier in the evening. Carey, judging all women easy conquest, was not to be discouraged. He wanted to kiss her, and he meant to kiss her before he took her back.

"Why shouldn't I kiss you?" he demanded breathlessly in the pause following her repulse. "You are the most beautiful person in the world. I love you."

"There is no law against that," she said lightly, "only against your telling me so."

"But I want to tell you," he insisted.

"Love!" she scoffed. "What is it? A word which comes to the lips too readily and means nothing."

"You are as cold as the moonlight," he said. "I'm head over ears in love with you. I brought you here just to tell you that."

"Why go to so much trouble? Any old place would have served." Her face close to his was scornful; the dark eyes, lit with laughter, met his baffled gaze with bright indifference. "Now let me tell you for your better information that, though a woman loves admiration and homage from your sex, unless she is a poor sort of woman, she doesn't want to be made love to except by the man who holds her heart. My kisses are not for the asking, I would have you know."

"I think you are very unkind," he said in sulky tones. "And you aren't quite honest. A girl with a face like yours has no right to resemble a snowdrift. I believed you were more generous."

She laughed mockingly.

"How you have wasted your time through lack of discernment. Take me back. The night is young yet. You may have better luck next time."

All things considered Iris felt that she did not deserve her husband's reproach when she returned too late for their dance. Her absence on the river in Carey's company vexed him. This surprised rather than displeased her; it is not over-exacting affection but indifference which hurts.

"I hunted everywhere for you when our dance came off," he said, aggrieved. "Where have you been? It's rather rotten of you, Iris."

Later, in their own room, he reverted to the subject, revealing a rankling sense of injury which amazed her.

"You made yourself very conspicuous with Carey to-night," he said.

She turned to him in surprise.

"Because I went on the river?"

"Because you allowed him to monopolize you."

"That's the custom here," she retorted, thinking that he inclined to set the example. "I don't think I behaved with particular indiscretion."

"Clearly the arrangement with me counted for nothing when a more attractive alternative offered," he said. "That was scarcely agreeable for me."

"Oh, Nigel!"

For one brief moment she stood, surprised still, faintly resentful. She had not deserved this. Then, with a swift flash of understanding, she realized that he was hurt, even jealous. This idea, incredible at first, took convincing hold of her mind while she looked

at him and observed the clouded annoyance of his expression ; like something warmly reassuring it gripped her imagination and softened her mood.

“ I would far rather have danced with you,” she said, and drew his face to hers and kissed him.

## XIX

THE Hennellys left Greenway Manor and crossed to France for a final fling, as Nigel expressed it, before settling down to the routine of office work for himself and for Iris the search after congenial pursuit during his daily absence. They were making the most of their holiday, enjoying every minute to the full. A few days were spent in Paris. Wonderful Paris ; its boulevards a little dusty, its parks and gardens wearing a summertime look of fatigue.

Iris visited the shops. No woman, according to her, ever stayed in Paris without buying dresses. Her love for these things appeared to Nigel to amount almost to mania. She possessed more dresses than she could wear already ; yet she bought lavishly. It was not only dresses she purchased unnecessarily, but coats and hats. The hats seemed on the whole the most expensive ; there was so little of them for the money.

Taking into account Nigel's losses at cards and Iris's extravagance in the matter of clothes, the holiday proved an expensive affair. They returned home charged with laudable intentions of determined economy, in which praiseworthy resolve each was absolutely sincere, and also entirely incapable of its sustained performance. Economy, except in spasms, was beyond

Iris, and Nigel was more apt at preaching the need for it than in practising it.

Always when he spoke of economy he would stand in front of, and stare reflectively at, either of the remaining pictures, which hung, one in the corridor, the other in the sitting-room, a perpetual reminder of the comfortable sum they represented. It seemed to him that if they could realize that sum and get things straightened out again, they would keep going indefinitely. He had indulged that happy belief on the former occasion when two of the pictures were parted with to relieve the press of debt ; and here they were fairly on the rocks again. This time however there was no accumulation of debts to absorb the greater part of the money ; but they were living far in excess of their income, and without some additional sum they were bound to come to grief sooner or later.

With her return home Iris resumed her customary practice of the weekly visit to her father. The fact that a gap of three Sundays intervened between this visit and its predecessor encouraged her in a faint hope that it might favourably affect Mr. Chaffery's attitude towards her, and break down the rigid rule of stern refusal of admittance which had held inexorably hitherto.

She had grown to a large extent reconciled to her separation from him. Her feeling towards him now held less of filial affection and was become more contemptuously indulgent and slightly embittered. There were times when she wondered why she persisted in her attempt at reconciliation ? It surely was super-



erogatory to subject herself to this oft-repeated snub from a feeling of reluctance to snap the link entirely ? There was something a little cringing in this pertinacious pursuit of him ; it showed the instinct of the beaten cur which licks the hand that struck it.

A shamed flush stained her face as this thought presented itself. Was not that after all her attitude ? —and Nigel's ? Were they not both ready to abase themselves before the golden calf of Mr. Chaffery's wealth ?

So distasteful and humiliating was the impression made on her by these reflections that, when, alighting from a taxi, she rang the door bell of her father's house, the customary response which her inquiry for Mr. Chaffery elicited—a response which never altered in its wording, “ Mr. Chaffery is not at home to Mrs. Hennelly ”—roused her to a first display of indignation. On other occasions she had been wont to smile reassuringly on the distressed old butler, whose unpleasant duty it was to convey this message ; but on that occasion there was no smile.

“ Tell him I shall not call again,” she said, her manner betraying her annoyance. “ If at any time he wishes for me, he must send for me.”

Then, with some return of her former graciousness, she said a few kindly words to the subdued butler, re-entered her cab, and was driven away.

“ Now truly am I an orphan ! ” she mused, as she sat back in a corner and smiled to herself bitterly.

At least she was finished with fawning.

But in Nigel's opinion she had made a grave mistake.

"I can see no sense in putting the old boy's back up," he observed. "We've got to humour him."

"Why?" she asked bluntly, her mind still inflamed with the indignity of that suggestion of cringing, at which she had finally rebelled.

"Why! For the sake of our own interests, of course."

"That's just it. Hanging about after him for what we can get out of him! He sees it like that."

"We haven't got much out of him up to the present," he retorted.

"No. And we won't. I'm through with following after him like a hungry mongrel. I'll go to him if he sends for me, and not otherwise."

"Then I think the prospect of a family reunion is fairly remote," he replied. "You don't suppose for one moment that his will be the hand to dispatch the dove with the olive branch?"

At the moment she felt so entirely indifferent in regard to the whole matter that she answered with perfect sincerity:

"That's not troubling me."

"You are a chip of the old block," he said, and laughed, not altogether pleasantly.

Iris flared up instantly.

"You don't mean that in any complimentary sense," she said. "And however you mean it, I resent the comparison."

"Come back all I said," Nigel returned with lazy good humour. "In any case I meant merely that you possess some of his obstinacy."

"It isn't obstinacy," she contended; "it's pride. I am no longer going to toady to him. He's in the wrong, not I. I won't allow him to imagine we can't get along without his aid. I would die sooner than let him know we were short of money, and that I've sold those pictures. He is just waiting for something of the sort. Expecting I will crawl back to him and whine for help. And I won't."

"Oh, well!" he said excusingly. "The old boy can't help the possession of a crass nature. God made him."

Iris scrutinized him curiously. She would have preferred him to have shown greater animus and less desire towards propitiation. The humiliating analogy of the beaten cur disturbed her mind still. In this mood she wanted him to display more spirit; he ought to uphold her indignation. Instead she believed that if Mr. Chaffery even now deigned to notice his existence, he would forgive past insults and swallow those to come.

She did not wish him to assume this attitude. She preferred to dwell upon the thought of him refusing to vacate his seat at Mr. Chaffery's bidding; again of almost driving over him and leaning from the motor-car to hurl abuse at him for getting in the way. That was the spirit she liked him to show. If he did these things knowing it was Mr. Chaffery he offended she would have applauded him. A man should hit back, even when the act resulted in personal loss. A man ought to hit back; it was for that purpose nature had imbued him with the fighting instinct. He ought to hit back, not cringe.

She hoped that her father would learn to respect her husband ; it was of less importance that he should like him. No sacrifice was too great she felt if only she could prove to her father the sterling worth of the man she had chosen, and her own independence of himself.

## XX

**R**ESOLUTIONS of a great independence, such as Iris made, cost less in the making than in maintaining, a rule which applies to many things. With the cessation of her periodic visits to her old home the sense of the irrevocable nature of her rupture with her father became more acute. The break seemed so very complete.

She began to realize how greatly she had leaned secretly on the possibility of a reconciliation. She had not believed that he could deliberately shut her out of his life simply for having disobeyed him. That a silence of years should fall between them would have seemed to her incredible had it not actually happened.

A hardness crystallized about her thoughts of him, and made his weaknesses, the little meannesses, the petty arrogance, very apparent. She had known he was possessed of these qualities ; but she had never before deliberately dwelt upon them, dragged them forth into the cold merciless light of criticism, passed them relentlessly beneath her mental microscope. He was her father ; she had accepted him with his faults and his more amiable qualities, had been in her way fond of him ; now a revulsion of feeling overwhelmed her ; she despised him utterly, felt almost

indifferent towards him. He could have made her life happy ; instead he was trying to wreck it on the hardest rocks he knew of. He wanted to see her beaten, and thus fulfil his gloomy prediction of matrimonial disaster for them. But they would keep their frail craft afloat somehow ; he should never know the triumph of seeing them sucked under in a sea of difficulties of their own making. Even if this should happen she would hide their disaster from his knowledge.

Her reluctance to part with the pictures had been due to this spirit ; it hardened her now in her resolve that come what might she would never let him know that she had sold them. She regarded the continued deception in the matter of the insurance much as Nigel regarded it. Her father could afford to pay it, then let him pay ; scruples of conscience weighed with her no longer. In this respect she was altogether less sensitive than formerly.

The strain consequent on a lack of ready money began to make itself felt. The bills were accumulating afresh ; credit was less easy to obtain ; as a result Iris found herself handicapped by a want of funds. The outcome of this was a curtailing of many of the pleasant social amenities they had indulged in freely, which meant so much to Iris and kept her afloat on the surface of her world. Gradually she found herself dropping out of things, till she was faced with the question of whether the two remaining pictures would not have to follow the others. Their sale would solve immediate difficulties. But the reason for her earlier



reluctance held ; she clung to the pictures as a sick man clings to life, even when it has little to offer him. The rags of her pride adhered to them, as something fine which had suffered bedragsmlement.

At which point in their fortunes chance intervened and relieved them of the direction of affairs. One windy Sunday night, while the Hennellys were absent over the week-end, the entire building in which they had their flat was burned to the ground. They returned to find the blackened walls standing gaunt against a pallid sky, and nothing within that vast shell to indicate the position even of their suite of rooms. The flames had devoured everything save human lives. So far as was known everyone had escaped without injury.

But the loss of property was considerable. The Hennellys suffered severely. Nothing, save the pictures, was insured. The furniture, some of which was new and was not even paid for, was gone ; and all that remained to Iris of a very complete wardrobe were the clothes she had taken away with her, and such jewellery as she wore or carried in her jewel-case. It was a most appalling disaster.

They found temporary shelter in a boarding establishment in the neighbourhood ; and from this dreary haven set about the search for new quarters, as comfortable and not more expensive than the last. The question of refurnishing stared them in the face. How was this to be accomplished with an overdraft at the bank, and creditors pressing them for the settlement of accounts long overdue ?

"At least we'll have the insurance money for the pictures," Iris said.

"Pity you parted with any of them," Nigel returned. "It's the two of least value which perished. If they had all gone it would have been a fine thing."

"Yes," she agreed.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked presently. "Hadn't you better see the old man and start him going?"

"No." Her tone sounded almost fierce. "I believe I would sooner lose the money than do that," she said.

"Oh, rot! A few thousands will come in handy just now," he rejoined.

At what time, she wondered cynically, would not a few thousands come in handy?

"We can't afford to lose the money," he added, "for the luxury of airing our pride."

"We shan't lose it. Father is too much of a business man to need reminding. He is probably expecting me to rush at him and make a stir about it. He'll be upset with me because I don't; but he will attend to the matter all the same."

To Iris the insurance money was altogether subordinate to her interest in her father's attitude in respect to her claim. She had clearly announced that he must send for her if he wanted her; but she had not imagined that he would ever do so. The question now arose whether he would not after all be obliged to summon her. She waited, curious and expectant, to learn what his first move would be. Her mind,

crystal clear and hard as crystal in connection with everything to do with their disagreement, relaxed nothing of its fierce determination to defend her husband, her own actions, from his contemptuous belittlement. She was very firmly resolved that she would not approach him on this matter. She would advance no step to meet him in any way.

Mr. Chaffery did, after considerable delay, during which as she had supposed he waited in the full expectation of hearing from her, send for his daughter. He dispatched to her a typewritten letter signed in his own handwriting, in which he stated briefly that he desired to see her on a matter of business. He appointed a time in which he would receive her at his office on the following day.

The receipt of this letter occasioned Iris immense satisfaction. A first gleam of triumph shone in her eyes while she read it. She had scored a victory, a very minor victory; nevertheless the first advantage in the bloodless duel was hers. She showed the letter to Nigel.

"You see," she said, "he has sent for me."

"By Jove! Yes. I begin to think you are a match for him after all, old thing."

Hennelly was exceedingly pleased. He had been feeling somewhat anxious in regard to their claim.

"It's a pity you've got to own to selling the two," he observed.

This reminder drenched the triumph considerably. It was peculiarly humiliating to Iris that the necessity for doing so must arise.

“He’ll gloat over that,” she said.

“Never mind, darling.” He stooped and kissed her. “Let’s go out somewhere and have a champagne dinner to-night to celebrate the fortune.”

The clouds were never allowed to gather for long in the blue serenity of Nigel’s sky.

## XXI

ON the following day Iris went into the City. It was a dull cheerless day with intermittent drizzling rain, and unexpected gusts of wind which caught one unawares and drove the rain into the face with disconcerting suddenness.

Iris drove to her father's office, and, dismissing the taxi-cab, went inside, and was conducted ceremoniously up steps and through rooms and along passages and down steps and again up more steps to the labyrinth where Mr. Chaffery transacted his business undisturbed by the happenings of the outer world.

The clerk who conducted this impressive tour tapped with reverential respect upon the heavy door behind which Mr. Chaffery sat in splendid solitude, and receiving an invitation to enter, turned the handle softly and was preceding Iris into the room, when she stopped him peremptorily.

"Thank you," she said, and slipped past him before he quite realized her purpose, "my father is expecting me."

She shut the door a little unceremoniously in his face. That was the Chaffery way; before it all the elaborate precautions of long-established custom went down like so much paper obstruction in the passage of an irresistible flood. The clerk went reluctantly

away with many misgivings, while the daughter of Mr. Chaffery made direct for her objective, and coming to a pause in front of the big writing-table at which Mr. Chaffery was seated, she looked with quiet antagonism into the shrewd but obviously ageing face of the father whom she had not seen since the night of her elopement, four years earlier.

Neither she nor Mr. Chaffery appeared certain what form of procedure to take. They regarded one another with cold curiosity for several seconds before a feeling of necessity to snap the silence seized both simultaneously.

"Well!" said Mr. Chaffery.

"Well!" said Chaffery's daughter.

"Take a seat," he said curtly.

Iris accepted this invitation, and sat back, scrutinizing him with a direct disconcerting gaze. She considered that he looked much older and was not generally improved in appearance. Mr. Chaffery thought he had never seen her look handsomer or more prosperous and assured. She was certainly proving that she could get on very well without him.

"You sent for me," she said, in cool aloof tones. Her manner conveyed that under no other circumstance would she be there.

"It was necessary on account of the claim for insurance," he said, and fidgeted with some papers on the table before him. He eyed her over the top of his glasses. "It's rather a windfall for you, this."

"We need something," she returned coldly. "We lost everything in the fire."



"You would. Nothing insured, of course? Your spendthrift husband would never be in a position to pay the premiums."

"If you are going to abuse my husband, I will go," she said. "You have no right to insult him."

"Don't excite yourself," he returned. "I have no wish to insult him. On the contrary, I admit feeling both astonished and pleased at being called upon to make this claim for insurance of pictures which I had believed he would persuade you to dispose of long since. I always intended you should have that sum; but I anticipated you would realize on the pictures immediately. It is a satisfaction to me to find I was mistaken."

He was taking it for granted that the pictures had perished in the fire.

A sudden quick glow of triumphant pride set the warm blood circulating pleasantly in Iris's veins. This was what she had aimed at, desired more than she had desired anything since her hunger for Nigel had moved her to elope with him across the water, this acknowledgment from Mr. Chaffery of his mistake in his estimate of her husband's character. In the gratified surprise of the moment she overlooked the very important facts that Mr. Chaffery in his estimate had not been mistaken, that his present belief was wholly fallacious, that she by her acquiescing silence was deepening this erroneous impression and deliberately deceiving him in the matter of the pictures. That aspect of the case did not then present itself. Her

mind was obsessed with the necessity for leaving her father with a fixed impression of the admirable qualities of Nigel, his independence of an indifference to Mr. Chaffery's wealth. This was of primary importance.

In her eagerness on this point it became easy to deceive herself into believing that she was not deliberately misleading him in the matter. She was not concerned with the insurance money or the deception practised on the company; these were side issues wholly inconsequent compared with the big issue which mattered so intensely to her. It was the Chaffery spirit pitting itself against that other and older Chaffery in a duel which necessitated the weapons of sophistry in the attempt to defeat the stouter steel of truth, which having encountered doubt was temporarily weakened.

"I think if you had allowed yourself to make Nigel's acquaintance you would have realized your mistake earlier," she said. "Your attitude towards him has been very unjust. I say nothing of your treatment of me."

Mr. Chaffery stared at her for a moment or so in speechless amazement, then he said coldly:

"You are overlooking, I think, your undutiful behaviour towards me. When you ran away from the protection of my roof my responsibility in regard to you was ended."

"What was I to do?" she said. "You wouldn't hear a word in Nigel's favour. You wouldn't give him a chance. You simply vetoed everything. We neither

of us wanted a rupture. It's been painful enough for me. But what could we do?"

"It's a little late for going into that question now," Mr. Chaffery returned in a tone which discouraged further reference to the subject.

His daughter regarded him with an air of exasperation. What could she urge against this obstinate pride?

"You never give in, do you?" she said.

Mr. Chaffery saw no reason why he should give in. He remained silent. He wanted to get on with the business for which he required her presence; and here was she going off at a tangent into discursive hostilities that led nowhere, save into such undesirable regions as the unforgiven past. He tapped the papers on the table with sharp irritability.

"If you hadn't been so hard; if only you had received me!" she said. "If only you had come to see us! Nigel would have welcomed you for my sake."

"I daresay," Mr. Chaffery replied dryly. "I am not however interested in Nigel. But I am relieved that he is able to provide for you, and that you appear happy. I should have perhaps esteemed him more highly if he had given you children. But a man who accepts life's responsibilities lightly shirks parental obligations usually."

Iris flamed into anger. She missed the pathos of old Chaffery's disappointment. He had hoped that she would have children; he had counted on this; had looked to another generation to heal the breach

in this. A grandchild would have provided him with an interest, given him a sense of someone of his own to carry on things. Here was this futile young couple doing nothing whatever to justify their existence; taking everything, accepting none of the obligations and responsibilities of life; playing about, as Mr. Chaffery saw it—jazzing. Why at least could they not produce a child?

“We can’t afford to have children,” Iris said, flushed and annoyed.

“Oh, yes you can.”

She met his gaze fully, apprehending his meaning.

“Oh! I know. *You’d* provide for them. And get them under your thumb—me too, if you could. That’s not good enough.”

“Ah, well!” Mr. Chaffery sat forward and took up a pen. “Let’s get on with filling in this insurance claim.”

Iris continued to stare at him with cheeks ablaze. She had almost forgotten the object of her visit in the odd turn the talk had taken. Her thoughts were still engrossed with the subject of his complaint, when he began reading from the form on the table in front of him. She surveyed him with open antagonism, still considering his talk about children, scarce heeding what he read. But, her inattention notwithstanding, she did realize that he was making out a claim for ten thousand pounds, the insurance on four pictures; and she did not even then confess to having parted with the two more valuable paintings. She could not bring herself to make this admission.

It was doubtful whether she saw the matter in the light of defrauding the insurance company ; it was to her simply something between her father and herself.

## XXII

THE fire which destroyed their first home marked an epoch in the Hennellys' lives. It was as the swift downward stroke of the sword of fate which ripped into and destroyed the solid fabric of their happiness. They had trodden their insecure path with careless unheeding, and never perceived the abyss which lay ahead, and cut through the pleasant places and finally ensnared them. They dropped right down into darkness suddenly with the utmost unpreparedness, like sleep walkers reaching the cliff side and going over it.

It was amazing that Hennelly should have gone with eyes shut to the danger of the claim which his wife was making from the insurance company through her father. The company, having absolute confidence in Mr. Chaffery, paid over the full amount for which the pictures were insured without a sufficient investigation of the circumstances. Investigation followed, and the facts came to light.

Hennelly had expressed some misgiving about letting the claim go through as it was. He believed that the sale of the two pictures must inevitably be disclosed during the course of the proceedings; and he was of the opinion that for it to come out in this way would prejudice their case with Mr. Chaffery more adversely



than a timely admission would do. But Iris let the matter drift. She would resolve one moment to inform her father, and in a fraction of time was back again at the point of indecision at which her reluctance to admit defeat quashed her former resolution.

"We'll wait and see how things go," she said.

"He's bound to find out."

"I don't know. Anyway, we'll let it leak out by degrees. When he discovers it I shall say, 'Yes, of course. Didn't you know?' I can't tell him somehow. He'll sneer at you."

They moved into a new flat and refurnished on the strength of the anticipated windfall. When eventually the cheque was paid into Iris's account at the bank she was quietly elated. She felt that she had scored off Mr. Chaffery by having held her peace.

"You see, they paid in full without any fuss. No doubt that was because father had continued the premiums. That makes it all right, I expect."

Nigel did not feel very sanguine about this; but he saw no reason why they should disturb themselves in the matter. Chaffery had made out the claim. If there was any fuss he would have to refund the money.

In the meanwhile they set to work to spend it.

Wonderful amount! Inexhaustible it seemed to Nigel. Yet already he and Iris had managed to run through six thousand pounds, and found themselves again in debt. It was amazing where it all went.

The business of the insurance settled, the communication between Mr. Chaffery and his daughter ceased abruptly. This was a disappointment to Iris, who had

hoped that the ice once broken, a meeting between her father and husband might be contrived. She invited Mr. Chaffery to come and view their new flat. But Mr. Chaffery remained firm in his refusal to have any intercourse with his son-in-law. He evinced no interest in the flat ; but he expressed himself willing to receive his daughter on any occasion that she might call to see him in the future.

The concession which at one time would have pleased Iris, left her indifferent now. If he refused to know her husband the veto must extend to herself. She would trouble no further about him. His reproach that they had no children rankled with her, while his expressed contempt for Nigel was a source of bitter anger. Any affection which she once had felt for him perished under his harsh treatment. Nothing was improved by their meeting. She had his permission to call at the house, which, since the invitation did not include Nigel, was an empty concession of which she had no thought of availing herself.

She had repeated to Nigel the substance of Mr. Chaffery's remarks anent children ; and Nigel, to whom the subject had not before presented itself, and who certainly had no desire for children, gave the matter serious consideration. If children could rope in the Chaffery millions. . . . Well, why not ?

To Nigel, Mr. Chaffery's fortune, in which they might not participate, resembled mineral concessions on certain lands which were impracticable for working operations : the knowledge that the minerals were there, though they could not be got at, rendered the

disappointment far more acute than any uncertainty as to their prospects could have done. It was the Tantalus cup which might not touch the lips it hovered near.

"If a kid would work the oracle, I wouldn't mind," he said.

"You don't understand him," Iris answered. "It would only give him a hold over us; it wouldn't help us at all. He would dictate terms—everything. He'd interfere. Oh! I know him. The child wouldn't belong to us. And he would take care *you* didn't touch his money. He has his knife into you all right."

"Pompous ass!" Nigel returned. "Never mind. If he twists the knife often enough the wound will enlarge or putrefy and the knife will slip out of its own accord. I'm not going to worry about that."

If not a matter for worry, it was at times a subject for speculation whether little hands might not have closed the breach. They had neither of them wanted children; he felt no parental stir now when thinking of this possibility. They were very happy together; they enjoyed quite a good time. Children would inevitably interfere, break in assertively upon the harmony of their lives, interpose between them and their pleasures, change things. He did not wish that to happen—unless the Chaffery millions came with them. Change under those conditions would be agreeable.

The more money that passed through Nigel's hands the greater grew his desire for it, the more important did his father-in-law's fortune loom in his imagination.

It became a habit with him to think out ways and means whereby he might conceivably get round old Chaffery. He wished that Mr. Chaffery's life might be endangered, and that he might be conveniently upon the spot and step in and save him gallantly. He pictured Mr. Chaffery bathing in the sea—although Mr. Chaffery never bathed anywhere save in a bath—and himself diving in on seeing his father-in-law in difficulties and bringing him safely to land. Mr. Chaffery would express his gratitude in language profusely cordial, when he had spat up sufficient salt water to permit of this eloquence; and he would answer modestly: "That's all right. I'm glad to have been of service to you." Any simple thing like that.

Or a hold-up in the City; in the sacred precincts of Mr. Chaffery's office even; or on the road—the modern highwayman in the guise of a desperate down and out; and himself always conveniently on the spot at the crucial moment.

Why couldn't things happen like that sometimes in life? The long arm of coincidence! It was not impossible.

He woke from these airy imaginings to the bleak reality of what was happening in his own immediate world. He was to be mixed up with Mr. Chaffery quite as intimately as in his imagining he had pictured himself mixed up, but in a less heroic and altogether more distressing rôle.

It had come within the knowledge of the insurance company responsible for the insurance of the pictures, that two of these pictures, for the destruction of which

they had already paid, had not perished in the fire in which they were supposed to have perished, but had been sold previously to Mr. Matthew P. Lowitz of Chicago.

## XXIII

**A**RRESTED on a charge of attempted fraud ! The shock of the thing was paralysing. The sudden, surprising, horrible swiftness of it, like a ghastly nightmare from which one could not awake, so stunned and stupefied the principal actors in the unnecessary, sordid social drama, that, seeking the only cover which the moment seemed to offer, Iris took refuge in denial, and prejudiced her case by a wholly ineffective lie.

The only person who believed the lie was Mr. Chaffery, who had known his daughter as a naturally truthful person, which she usually was. The silly purposeless lie could not be sustained for any length of time ; it strengthened the evidence against her and served no useful purpose.

Mr. Chaffery had himself assisted in bringing matters to a head. The insurance company first began to stir itself, having ascertained through methods of its own that the four pictures had not perished in the fire as had been stated ; two of them probably had perished thus, but two had undoubtedly been disposed of earlier, and were then in America.

Mr. Chaffery's indignation on being informed of the existence and present whereabouts of these pictures was so great that he kicked up, what he termed, a hell



of a row, before he was finally convinced that they actually were in existence, and that his own daughter had disposed of them privately and had deliberately withheld the information.

The thing broke Mr. Chaffery up as nothing else could have done. He shrank visibly, and became in a short while an infirm and dispirited old man. The disgrace of it cut him deeply. His daughter, his only child, arrested for defrauding an insurance company ! And there was no possibility of hushing the thing up. He did his best ; but events marched too rapidly for him ; the thing once started had to go through to the finish.

“ This is the result of that damned scoundrel’s influence,” Mr. Chaffery stormed. “ He’s at the bottom of this trouble.”

He sent for Renshaw, now a rising and successful barrister.

Renshaw, when he saw him, was almost as shocked at the sight of Mr. Chaffery as he had been shocked and overwhelmed by the news of the arrest. The whole affair was beyond his understanding. It struck at him too in a different way ; it hurt him. Iris Chaffery had been his only love. To him she had been wonderful, incomparable. He had admired her intensely ; not her beauty alone ; true, her physical attractions had first won his attention ; but it was herself he loved, the something fine and direct and simple which he had plumbed during a fairly intimate acquaintance. He was so sure of these fine qualities, which he had discovered in her, that he found it very

difficult to reconcile his judgment of her character with this deplorable revelation of her dishonesty. Mr. Chaffery's denunciation of Nigel, reiterated many times and with ever-increasing venom, carried for him some dreary comfort. In a sense it explained matters. To the influence of Nigel Hennelly he also attributed her downfall. It was this influence which had dimmed the clear surfaces of her once frank nature. Her love had come under the domination of a man of weak will and irresponsible character, and this was the terrible result.

It would end for Iris, for Nigel too, as he saw it, in a term of imprisonment.

This was the fear which had got hold of Mr. Chaffery. The wealth which he had withheld from his daughter since her marriage he was now for pouring out in a futile attempt to buy her safety.

To Renshaw he said :

" You may remember I once told you I would give you a job some day. I little thought then the kind of job it would be. I sent for you because I believe in you. You know the trouble I'm in. Renshaw, you care for my girl—save her."

Mark Renshaw took the shaking hand extended to him and grasped it with warm sympathy. The man was broken utterly ; he was obviously suffering. If it ran through Renshaw's thoughts that indirectly all this trouble was the result of his own harshness, pity for the man in his terrible distress softened his judgment of him. So many people would act differently could they but foresee events.

" I'll do what I can," he said.

"I would to God you had married her instead of that hound!" Mr. Chaffery burst out, taking Renshaw so completely aback that he found nothing to say in response.

He wondered how Mr. Chaffery had surprised his secret? His devotion to Iris was not, he believed, common knowledge.

They were seated in the study of Mr. Chaffery's house. He had not been seen in the City since the blow fell. He shrank from the thought of appearing at his office, of meeting the curious eyes of his clerks and employees. No; he could not face it. The City and he were parted finally.

He had lost interest in the many enterprises which had absorbed his attention in the past. Nothing mattered now to the broken old man except his daughter's defence. All his energies, all the wealth which his diligence had amassed, which was no longer of any value to him, save for what it might achieve in the matter of her acquittal, were devoted solely to this cause. He had three barristers briefed for the defence, two of these were among the most eminent men in their profession, the third, in whom was fixed his whole hope and faith, the least important and youngest counsel, was Mark Renshaw, the man who would do his utmost for love of his client without regard of fee.

But how little in the circumstances could eloquence avail! The outlook was pretty hopeless. Mr. Chaffery, while he recognized this, refused to admit it. All his intelligence was strained to discover any line

of argument, no matter how thin, that might be worked up into some sort of defence.

"You know, Renshaw," he said, "she never understood what she was doing. She didn't realize that, having parted with two of the pictures, she couldn't claim the whole sum for which they were insured. Stupid, of course; but girls are stupid. When she realized what she had done she was frightened; that's why she lied about it. They'll bring up that lie against her. You make them understand it was fear made her deny having sold the pictures. If she hadn't been frightened, if she'd had time to reflect, she wouldn't have told that lie. It isn't like Iris. She's truthful."

It was pitiful to listen to the old man.

Renshaw was thankful to escape from the house. He had not seen Iris since the arrest. The preliminary interrogation over, she and Nigel were remanded on bail to await in dazed stupefaction further developments.

News of the double arrest had fallen like a thunderbolt into the midst of their circle of friends. The Hennellys' social position, their connection with the great financier, all added to the public interest which the case aroused. Pictures of the beautiful Mrs. Hennelly appeared in the newspapers, together with long paragraphs relating to her romantic marriage, and fantastic exaggerations of her elopement from her father's house.

Popular opinion was rather strong against Mr. Chaffery. The public mind held him largely respon-

sible for his daughter's position. Her youth and her beauty made a powerful bid for public sympathy ; and Nigel's war record, coupled with the dash of his elopement, and enhanced by his good looks, caught the popular fancy. The unromantic figure of Mr. Chaffery e'voked no sympathy.

Renshaw, proceeding direct from his interview with Mr. Chaffery to his first interview with Chaffery's daughter, alone felt any pity for the old man.

## XXIV

RENSHAW'S arrival at the flat interrupted a painful scene between husband and wife. This sudden crash, in which all their easy pleasant world seemed to topple about them, had an altogether unnerving effect upon Iris. Fear gripped her. Her heart felt like lead within her breast ; it was as though a cold hand clutched and dragged at it ; as though some potent drug worked in her veins causing this same leaden weight to beat with a terrible rapidity, which in its nervous palpitation sickened, and all but suffocated her. Her hands felt clammy. White-faced, with fear-distended eyes, she paced the carpet, backwards and forwards between window and door, making little ineffective movements with her hands, and murmuring every now and again, with an intonation that was almost a moan :

“ Oh ! What have I done ? What have I done ? ”

Nigel sat plunged in gloom. He had maintained so far a stony silence. There was no sense in admitting anything, and denial was futile. His attitude when alone with his wife was preoccupied and glum. He had not reproached her ; he was aware that the responsibility was equally his ; he could have prevented her from making the false claim had he attempted to do so. He was amazed at his own folly in not preventing it.



How could he have been so stupid as to allow the thing to go on?

"It's the finish for us," he said. "We're done for. I lose my job over this. We go under."

"Prison?" she whispered, and ceased her weary walking and turned to him.

"It's prison all right."

"For me," she said.

"For both of us."

"No. Oh! my dear, no." She went to him. She kneeled on the floor beside him and clasped his knee with trembling hands. "You've nothing to do with this. You know nothing about it. You must know nothing about it."

He looked down at her unconvinced.

"That won't work," he said.

"But it must. Why shouldn't it, if I swear it is so? It's no use the two of us going under. You must keep on, keep your job. I've got to go under. I feel the walls closing upon me." The tears were streaming down her face now; she made no attempt to stay them. "But not you too. Oh, my dear, not you!"

"I can't let you face it alone," he said.

At the moment he believed himself to be sincere in the sentiment he voiced. He put an arm about her shoulders in an effort to comfort her.

"It's quite as much my fault, really. I'd feel a hopeless outsider if I didn't stand beside you in this."

"Yes, I know. I understand. But don't you see, dear heart, that that's not going to help me? It

would only hurt me more to have them point at you. I did this thing. I've got to suffer for it. But not you. That would make my punishment worse."

"I'll suffer in any event," he said. "Do you suppose it won't hurt me equally—what they do to you?"

She sobbed bitterly.

"O Nigel! Whatever possessed me? O dear God! I didn't understand. I didn't understand."

She leaned her head against his arm and cried unrestrainedly.

"Buck up, Iris! We've got to put up a fight."

"Yes, I know. But I seem to be falling to pieces. I'm frightened, Nigel. And the disgrace of it. . . . It's that which hurts most."

The disgrace! Yes; it was the sting of that which lashed him. They were finished. Their lives had crashed in ruin.

"It's all ended—everything," she wailed. "And I'd meant to make father admit he was in the wrong. I wanted to make him see how fine you were; how happy we were together."

"We've been that anyhow," he interposed. "We'll win up somehow again, old thing, and carry on. We'll win up."

"You will," she sobbed.

"You too."

She squeezed his arm.

"You'll trail me in your wake—like a winged bird. I'll be a drag on you; you'll suffer it for love's sake. They can't destroy our love, dear—even though I bring disgrace on you."

"You mustn't say that. We are equally blameworthy," he insisted.

"No." She was very firm on her point. "The only thing for you to do, the only way in which you can help, is to stand clear of this. You knew nothing about it. It was my own act. I must bear the blame. . . ."

And at that moment Renshaw was announced and the miserable duologue ended.

When Renshaw entered he found Iris alone. Nigel, acting on his wife's suggestion, had gone into another room. This was the first deliberate step to be taken towards dissociating Nigel with the crime for which they both stood charged. The acquiescent part he played on this occasion signified his voluntary assumption of the attitude he subsequently adopted. So insidious is the art of self-deception that by a swift process of assimilation the suggestion put forward by Iris to the effect that he actually was not culpable, but had remained more or less unaware of what she was doing, so sank into and influenced his mind that he became eventually firmly persuaded of his own ignorance of what was going on. Moreover, he felt that in his willingness to share the blame with her, as in the silence he had maintained throughout, he was behaving rather well. It was an opinion which later many people shared ; but for the present his fine qualities were a little obscure.

Renshaw found the story of his innocence somewhat difficult to grasp. He was frankly incredulous. The fact which his mind did lay hold of was that the woman,

like the first Mother of the race, was prepared to take the blame.

Iris was so relieved to see Mark Renshaw, and so consoled to find that whatever she had done, despite disgrace and the world's condemnation, she still retained the affection of this sturdy friend, that the consciousness of her tear-ravaged face and obvious distress did not disturb her.

She sat beside him on the sofa and held his hand and poured out her story to him. He showed a wonderful facility for seeing her point of view, for recognizing the blind impulses which had driven her on to disaster.

It was the story of ignorant blundering rather than one of wilful criminal intent. A man would have been more than human had he not been touched by the pitifulness of the recital, its crass stupidity, and by the narrator's loyalty to her husband. The last excited many emotions beside pity in her listener. To Renshaw, her quick, jealous defence of Nigel caused something of a jar.

"Mark, you have to make that clear," she said earnestly. "You must leave the court in no doubt as to that. Nigel knew nothing whatever about it."

"I am briefed to defend you, Iris, not your husband," he answered.

"That's father again," she said, with a flash of bitter anger. "He doesn't care what becomes of Nigel. He only minds the disgrace for me—because I am his daughter."

"Don't be too hard on him," Renshaw said. "He's cut to the heart about this."

"He could have prevented it," she answered.

"He's doing his best for you," he said.

Iris remained unmoved.

"He can do very little," she said. "Tell him so."

Suddenly her face softened. "At least, I'm grateful that he sent you to me. Whatever happens, Mark, the knowledge that you are fighting for me will sustain me wonderfully. Just to get a friendly gleam from your eye occasionally. . . . It's going to help no end. I'm so frightened. When I see all the cold unfriendly faces turned towards me I'll be ready to drop with fright. Then I'll catch your eye, and I shall know I have one friend in the world. You can't imagine what a comfort that will be to me."

"Poor little soul!" he said.

"Have I been very wicked, Mark?" she asked.

"You have been very stupid," he said. "I don't for one moment think there was ever any evil intent in your mind. I incline to the belief that you didn't realize what you were doing."

"It's true," she said. "But you'll be very clever if you convince others that it's true. I didn't mean to defraud. It's stealing, I suppose? Fancy, Mark, my stealing money!" She smiled wanly. "It always seemed to me to flow like water from a tap. Then when I married Nigel, the drought followed."

"Well," he said, "we've got to put our heads together and see what we can contrive in the form of a defence."

"What's the good?" she asked. "I did it. I

said at first I didn't ; but everyone knew I lied. So there it is."

" Yes," he allowed. " But we have to justify our actions as far as is possible. You didn't realize that the sum claimed was not legally due. The fire consumed two of the pictures. You were aware they were insured ; and it did not occur to you that, having sold two pictures, you were not entitled to the whole amount for which they were insured. It's a weak defence ; but we must strengthen it where we can. The chief thing is to make it sound convincing."

She smiled sadly.

" Mark, my only justification is that I was extravagant. I never had been obliged to consider means. I couldn't manage on the income my husband earned. I sold the pictures without his knowledge. My husband knew nothing ; my father knew nothing. I was afraid to tell them. I was ashamed. That's more convincing than the other defence, Mark ; and it's true."

## XXV

THE days which followed were a continuous nightmare through which Iris lived from hour to hour always with the same sickening fear tugging at her heart, the same dread apprehension of impending disaster weighing her down ; with the suffocating feeling as of walls closing in upon her, shutting her off for ever from the world she had known.

A dull despair seized hold of her which refused to loosen its grip ; nothing her husband could say, or Renshaw urge, had power to rouse her from this apathy of frightened misery, in which she saw herself disgraced for all time, shut away from the light behind prison walls.

Why had she done this thing ? She asked herself that question often. Surely she was not so dull of intelligence that she had failed to recognize it as wrong ? No ; there was nothing wrong with her intelligence. Simply, she had passed over that aspect of the case, had never given it attention. Everything had been subordinated to her desire to outwit her father. She had not scrupled in the methods used to gain her end. Had she dealt direct with the insurance company she would never have made any false declaration ; it was her inability to bring herself to acknowledge defeat when it came to the point which had tempted her to her fall. Pride had been her



undoing. She had stooped to dishonour rather than yield. It was a touch of the Chaffery nature in her, the quality of obstinate pride which would not submit even to reason.

At the back of Iris's despair burned a flame of indignation which helped to rouse the brooding mind fitfully to a spirit of anger that like some corrosive fluid overran and burned what it touched. Bitter thoughts crowded her brain and poisoned all her earlier and more kindly memories of her father. She pictured him arrogant and obstinate, autocratic in his dealings with her, unreasonable in his attitude of blind dislike of her husband ; unforgiving, hard, unjust. She held him responsible for her present unhappy position. That he was suffering too, that he would have given all his wealth to undo what was done, had no effect on her. She had no faith in his tardy remorse. His wealth was of no use to her.

Mr. Chaffery paid a visit to the flat, his first visit to his daughter. He got out of the car and told his chauffeur to wait about in the vicinity for him, and went into the building and up in the lift to the Hennellys' flat, which was on the second floor. He rang the bell and was admitted by a smart and vaguely wondering maid, and left alone in the sitting-room while the servant informed Iris, who was lying down after a sleepless night, of the visitor's arrival.

Iris, with the little flame of anger, which never wholly died down, spurting up redly, slipped her feet to the floor, and stood up and surveyed her white face in a mirror.

So he could come when he was no longer wanted !

She wondered, faintly resentful why he had come ? This visit could do no good ; nothing could ever work now towards a reconciliation.

That he might wish to discuss the case with her did occur as probable to her wearied brain, overstrained with anxiety and want of sleep ; but she felt no inclination to go into the matter with him. She had been worried with the different men he had procured to defend her, and had turned down two of these, and entrusted her case entirely to Renshaw. Mark would do his best for her. No one, she believed, could get her out of this mess ; but he would watch over her interests and help her with his advice, and even more with his presence. His personality had a wonderfully stimulating effect on her. He was of more use to her during this time than anyone because of his quiet force and abstention from worrying her with useless advice. He was busy working up her defence ; his sole demand being that she should not weaken this by anything she might be tempted to say in over-anxiety to shield her husband. In her determination to clear Nigel of complicity she was inclined unnecessarily to inculcate herself.

When Iris entered the sitting-room, which she did so quietly that Mr. Chaffery, standing facing the window, did not hear her, she stood for a moment, motionless, regarding the shrunken figure in the window embrasure with its look of age and weariness and general debility. He was not like the same man ; the buoyant assurance had gone with the last of his healthy vigour.

He was rather an object for pity than anger, this infirm, flabby, elderly man.

Iris shut the door behind her ; and at the sound, slight though it was, he turned quickly and surveyed her. So they stood, father and daughter, staring at one another.

She was the first to recover from the shock of that meeting. If she viewed his appearance with amaze, it was nothing compared with the pained surprise with which he saw the pitiful change in her. It was as though the tears she had shed had drenched and dimmed her beauty.

Iris invited him to be seated and seated herself.

" It seems ill-fortune and you come together," she said coldly.

He made no response to that ; instead he said, lifting a hand which shook visibly and passing it deliberately over the back of his hair :

" Where's your husband ? "

" Did you wish to see Nigel ? " she asked.

" No. My concern is with you."

He sat crumpled up in his seat and gazed at her with perplexed, uncomprehending eyes. He seemed to be trying to grasp her motives ; and he failed in doing this. The whole thing was so foreign to his conception of her.

" Why, in God's name," he broke forth abruptly, " did you conceal from me that you had sold those pictures ? They were yours to sell. I expected you would sell the lot. Largely that was my reason for giving them to you. You had no need to attempt to

defraud any insurance company for the sake of a few thousands of pounds."

That was an unfortunate beginning. While he was speaking she sat forward observing him with steadily growing hostility, which finally broke loose in an outburst of bitter recrimination. Until that moment he had no suspicion of his own responsibility in the matter. Her denunciation of him staggered him.

"The fact that you expected me to sell them, that you gave them to me for that purpose, with the sneer that you didn't suppose you would be called upon long to continue paying the insurance premiums, explains why I never told you. I felt I would have died sooner than let you know that your sneering taunt was justified. Well, I'm not going to die ; I'm going to prison instead," she finished in hard bitter tones.

"My God!" he ejaculated.

"And now you can have the satisfaction of saying it all turned out as you expected it would do," she added. "You said I would never be able to live within my husband's income. I couldn't. I'm extravagant. I've had an extravagant upbringing. And I would do anything—go to prison even—before I would ask you for what you might have given voluntarily, and never did."

"My God!" he said again.

He averted his face, and stared beyond her at the cream panels of the door. There was a crack in one of the panels ; his eyes glued to it, as to something which held his dazed attention, perhaps because it should not have been there. He appeared to be trying

to say something but was unable to articulate. Then with a clumsy movement he fumbled with his eyeglasses and dragged them off and wiped them on the corner of his handkerchief. Finally he stood up.

"I should have thought that training, instinct, respect for your name if for nothing else, would have restrained you," he said huskily. "It's not you. I know you better than you think I do; and I know that before your marriage this thing you've done would have been impossible to you. It's that scamp of a husband of yours who is at the back of you. It's not your extravagance alone. I know him. He's nothing better than——"

"Be careful!" she interrupted fiercely. "I will not allow you to say anything against my husband."

"He's at the bottom of this," Mr. Chaffery insisted, steadying himself by grasping the back of the chair. "I haven't a shadow of a doubt but that it was his idea entirely."

"No." Iris stood up and faced him. She felt it impossible, as he had done, to sustain this painful conversation and remain seated. "I tell you, no. He knew nothing whatever about it until the crash came."

"You sold two valuable pictures without his knowledge? And banked six thousand pounds without his being aware of your improved circumstances? You don't pay my intelligence so poor a tribute as to expect me to believe that, I'm sure."

"I don't care whether you believe it or not," she returned.

“ And he didn’t even notice the absence of the pictures ? ”

“ He did,” she flung back on a more intense note of bitterness. “ He hated the pictures. I told him I had taken them down because they were too big for the wall, and he expressed his satisfaction. They were an offence to him, as they were to me.”

“ I assert that that is merely another lie,” said Mr. Chaffery. “ You are trying to screen him. Renshaw told me that was your attitude, and I wouldn’t believe it until I had heard it from you. He’s sneaking behind you. He isn’t man enough to take his place at your side.”

“ Go ! ” Iris cried, her eyes ablaze with anger. “ If that’s all you came for it were better you had kept away. You come when you are not wanted. You are spending money like water in a useless attempt to save your name ; when it would have been a help you withheld it. I don’t want to see you. I don’t want your money. These things come too late.”

“ Iris ! ” he said brokenly.

He held out a hand to her, but she turned away.

“ Too late ! ” she muttered. “ Too late ! ”

She went like a sleep-walker to the door, opened it, and went out, leaving her father, stricken and old and humbled, alone in the quiet room. He had come there intending to plead with her, to urge her to effort in her own behalf. He was prepared to back the defence which Renshaw was working up to the best of his endeavour, to help to sustain the plea that she had misunderstood the position, that there had been

nothing wilful in her action. The plea of ignorance was their only defence, and Iris's first futile denial of having sold the pictures weakened that considerably.

He walked to the door and called after her.

"Iris!"

The quavering feeble voice did not carry.

"Iris! Iris!" he called, and went in search of her. When he reached her door he found it locked.

"Go away," she cried. "Go away."

The wondering maid found him wandering in the corridor and showed him out.



## XXVI

MR. CHAFFERY went down in the lift and got into his limousine and was driven home. He felt very ill. And he was worried and distressed on his daughter's account. He had gone to her intending to become reconciled with her, intending to work with her in the matter of her defence ; and this was the outcome. His visit had accomplished nothing ; it had not helped towards ending their estrangement. He had blundered somehow. And Iris had grown hard. That scamp had poisoned her mind against him.

He stumbled on reaching home, and all but collapsed in the hall. To the butler's anxious inquiries he responded curtly. There was nothing wrong with him. He was tired.

He requested that his solicitor should be communicated with and summoned to attend immediately. The matter was urgent.

Then he went into the study to await Mr. Grant's arrival.

The butler, acting on his own initiative, rang up, first the firm of solicitors, and subsequently Mr. Chaffery's medical adviser. In both instances he made use of the word urgent.

The lawyer was the first to arrive. He came into

the study, where Mr. Chaffery sat crumpled up in the depths of a big chair, carrying a small bag, as he had come on a former occasion for the purpose of making Mr. Chaffery's will. He had taken the precaution of bringing this document with him, in the hope that Mr. Chaffery was about to make another and more forgiving will, and that he would destroy this unduly harsh document.

When he was ushered into the room where Mr. Chaffery sat, he stepped forward briskly, in agreeable anticipation of the instructions he was about to receive; then he caught sight of Mr. Chaffery and stopped, dismayed. His client's appearance alarmed him.

Mr. Chaffery looked up at him with dim eyes, from which the old fire was gone for ever. He made no offer to shake hands.

"Chaffery, I'm sorry. You're not well," the lawyer said. "Shall I come some other time?"

He paused, embarrassed, feeling the question to be frivolous. There was not likely to be another time. The minutes even were valuable.

"No," Mr. Chaffery muttered. The dull eyes gazed at the lawyer hopelessly. "Want—to make—new will. Must leave—my girl—something. . . ."

As though the effort of speech were too difficult, his voice trailed off. He seemed to sink lower into the chair. The lawyer busied himself with getting out his papers. He placed them, with the will, on the table beside Mr. Chaffery, and sat down, pen in hand. He looked up expectantly, and stopped, concerned.

"I'll wait," he said. "You rest, Chaffery, for a minute or so. You don't look up to it."

Mr. Chaffery made an effort to sit straighter and to put out a hand for the document.

"Too la——" he was beginning, when his voice broke off in inarticulate gurglings, and his hand dropped back, and he, himself, collapsed, a shrunken huddled heap in the chair.

Grant, the lawyer, rose in quick alarm, and hastened to ring the bell and summon aid. The purple face of Mr. Chaffery, the collapsed figure, the sudden hush in the room, were frightening. He felt that something should be done, but he had no idea what to do. It was plain to him that Mr. Chaffery was dying.

The opening of the door, almost before his finger pressed the bell, was a tremendous relief. The doctor had arrived, and now came into the room. He went forward quickly to the chair in which the huddled figure sat and bent down and examined it, while Grant looked on in silence, and the butler hovered in the doorway with anxious concern for the employer he had served so long, and understood as only those who knew Mr. Chaffery intimately ever did understand his caustic and autocratic nature.

The doctor glanced up suddenly.

"Going to make his will?" he asked of Grant.

The little lawyer nodded without speaking. In his way he had felt affection for Mr. Chaffery, and this sudden collapse had shocked him.

"He won't make a will," the doctor said briefly, and stood up. "He's dead."

Mr. Grant stared, first at the speaker, and then at his late client, as if unable altogether to take in the full significance of this disturbing information. Chaffery, the man he had known intimately, for more years than he cared to reckon, the great financier, dead. He had seen him the day before and, beyond a certain depression, understandable in the circumstance, he had appeared in his usual health ; not robust as formerly, he had been going down hill for some time, but seemingly good for several years yet. And now he was dead—in a few minutes—immediately after speaking to him. The whole affair was extremely painful.

“ He’s had a lot of worry lately,” he said, rousing himself abruptly.

“ Yes.” The doctor’s tone revealed knowledge of the nature of the worry. “ It’s the excitement,” he said. “ But this of course was likely to happen any time during the past few years. The conditions of his life being different he might have carried on for some years yet. This trouble hasn’t helped him.”

“ No,” said the lawyer.

He started with a heavy heart to replace the papers in his bag. The old will held ; and it was not a good will. He wondered whether if he had been rather more urgent in his opposition, he could have influenced Mr. Chaffery towards a greater lenience at the time ? It was too late now. Too late. . . . The phrase which had been on Mr. Chaffery’s lips immediately before his death. They were the words Iris had spoken to her father. They had hit him at the moment of their utterance and became registered in his brain.

Too late. A phrase, significant in its hopelessness, framed by countless lips in countless ages.

News of Mr. Chaffery's death was communicated to his daughter immediately. It was Nigel who received the message ; and for some minutes after hearing that his father-in-law was dead, he remained in a state of blank astonishment with a mind incapable of considering any but the strictly personal aspect of this unforeseen event. How would Chaffery's death affect their interests in the case shortly coming on ? And had he carried out his threat to disinherit his daughter ? Since he had been there that afternoon, Nigel was inclined to think he might have relented. He could not believe that Chaffery, with all his money, would leave his daughter nothing out of a feeling of spite towards himself.

Then he roused himself to seek Iris and break the news to her. It was rough on her he felt to have this further shock to suffer at a time when she had trouble enough to bear. With some idea that she would need comforting, he sat beside her with an arm about her while he told her of Mr. Chaffery's sudden end. He held her and kissed her. But to his surprise Iris did not weep. Her misery had got beyond expression. She was so sunk in an apathy of despair that her father's death even could not rouse her. It was scarcely believable. He had been with her less than two hours earlier. It seemed impossible that he was dead. She could not visualize him in any way other than as alive and dominating, blusteringly offensive in his attack on Nigel, unforgiving in his attitude

towards herself. It was unthinkable that he should be still and quiet, unable any longer to interfere in her affairs; no more a power in his world—the world which had toadied servilely to him, not from any particular respect for himself but out of respect for the wealth he commanded.

“If he’s dead,” she said presently, “I killed him. I have been nothing but a disappointment to him, and now I am a disgrace.”

“There is more responsibility attaching to him in that than there is to you,” he said.

“Well, he’s got free of it,” she said, with that curious note of hardness in her voice which had sounded in it frequently of late, which was altogether new and unlike her usual tones. “I’m not sure he isn’t to be envied.”

“Don’t, Iris! Things will straighten out,” he said. “We’ll start afresh.”

“You,” she said dully.

It was odd how insistent she was in divorcing herself from participation in any future hope.

“You too, dearest.”

She remained unconvinced. She was disgraced for all time. Very clearly she apprehended that. Her friends had fallen away from her; there was none among them to come near her now. If she went to prison that would be the finish. At any price she must save Nigel from that. He must carry on; must rise above this thing which would crush her utterly.



## XXVII

THE funeral of Mr. Chaffery and the subsequent opening of his will, took place on the day before the hearing of the Hennellys' case. No relation followed Mr. Chaffery's remains, which were laid to rest beside those of his wife. The hearse was strewn with wreaths, and two motors followed laden with floral tributes, all very expensive, and all from business connections, and various societies to which Mr. Chaffery had belonged or subscribed.

There was one little sheaf of irises which reposed on the coffin, to which there was attached no name nor intimation from whom it came ; but the old butler, guessing who had sent this last gift, had placed it alone on the coffin as the one token which mattered amid the wealth of flowers.

The butler and Mr. Grant were the only genuine mourners among the crowd which followed the great financier to his grave. Each in his different way had understood and felt affection for the dead man ; each in his different way was adversely affected by his death. To no one else did the passing of Mr. Chaffery bear any particular significance. He died as he had lived, in splendid detachment. The one pathetic note in the funeral to strike the curious onlookers was the absence of his daughter, and the tragic circumstance which accounted for this.



The lawyer, Mr. Grant, his thoughts deeply engaged with Chaffery's daughter in connection with Chaffery's will and his too late repentance, felt oddly despondent. The task before him was depressing. It would have been distasteful in any event ; in view of the fact that Mr. Chaffery had himself earnestly desired to alter his will and died before doing so, it became not only distasteful but extremely painful. This blow, falling at a time when she was already overwhelmed with trouble, appeared peculiarly distressing. That on him devolved the disagreeable duty of acquainting her with the contents of a will which her father had made at a time of harsh exasperation and subsequently regretted, but unfortunately too late, worried Mr. Grant considerably. He felt in a sense morally responsible in that he had not attempted with sufficient persuasiveness to induce Mr. Chaffery to reconsider the matter earlier. It was too late now. The thing was finished and the will stood.

Mr. Grant called upon Iris the same day. Iris was too nervous and upset by the nearness of her own ordeal to betray the interest in her father's will which the lawyer had expected her to do ; nor did she appear to follow intelligently the reading of the wordy document, in which the legal phraseology was no more confusing to her than the enumeration of the numberless bequests to executors, to different societies and charities, hospitals, educational purposes, employees, etc. ; it seemed to her as though the list, with titles, names, addresses, descriptions, directions, stipulations, would never end. Her head ached, and her brain refused to take in these

inconsequent details. She wondered why he troubled to read them to her. Nothing of that mattered to her.

Her own name came into the reading ultimately, and her jaded interest quickened. There was handsome provision for her issue, if she had any. But this was in the hands of trustees, and so tied up that neither she nor Nigel could touch it. There were most implicit directions regarding education, and restrictive clauses whereby the legatee might not benefit unless he, or she, practised some profession. Following these tedious details was Mr. Chaffery's bequest to his daughter. This read :

"In trust for my daughter, Iris, wife of Nigel Hennelly, the sum of one hundred thousand pounds free of duty, the same to accumulate for her until such time as the death of her husband, the said Nigel Hennelly, when she shall inherit the said one hundred thousand pounds, plus interest, for her sole use and enjoyment. . . ."

Thus Mr. Chaffery had fulfilled his determination that Nigel Hennelly should never touch a penny of his money.

Mr. Grant paused in his reading, and Iris looked up at him with a world of bitter resentment clouding her saddened eyes. She opened her lips to speak, and closed them again resolutely. Mr. Grant turned from the document and looked at her with grave sympathy.

"I have just come from his funeral. I saw your irises on his coffin," he said simply.

Tears welled in her eyes. She understood and was silent.

Nigel was silent also. He stood behind his wife's chair with a hand on her shoulder, and his face was white. Hatred of Mr. Chaffery burned hot within him. The mean swine. So he had carried his animosity to the grave with him.

"The best thing to happen in the circumstances is for me to go outside and get in the way of a bus," he said, breaking the pause.

Iris's hand went up to meet his, pressed his; she made no verbal comment.

"The unfortunate part of this unhappy affair," Mr. Grant resumed, turning again to Iris, "is that Mr. Chaffery regretted having made this will. On the day of his death he sent for me to draw up a new will with the intention of making suitable provision for you; but, unhappily, he was too ill when I arrived. He collapsed before he could give me his instructions even. It was very painful for me, and I know he was in great distress himself. He made a particular effort; but his strength failed."

"That doesn't help us very much," Nigel said.

"No. But later it may possibly be some consolation to your wife," the lawyer said.

Iris, sunk in despondency, evinced no further interest in the matter. She was too disappointed, too upset, for speech. She had not believed that her father could carry his hatred of her husband to such length as this. She leaned back in her chair with closed eyes. Nigel

made a gesture towards the document on the table, which was not yet finished.

"Is there anything more which concerns us?" he asked.

"No. That is all so far as it affects your wife."

"Then, that's enough. We don't want to hear more. It only distresses her needlessly. I'll reserve my opinion of the testator. It wouldn't be improving for you to hear it."

Mr. Grant rose, and began to collect together his papers.

"I can appreciate your disappointment," he said. "It is natural you should feel somewhat strongly about this."

He took Iris's listless hand, and pressed it.

"I will see you to-morrow," he said. "Mr. Chaffery left written instructions as to the conduct of your defence. That will proceed just the same."

She stood up abruptly, two spots of colour showing in her white face, her eyes sombre and unforgiving.

"Oh!" she cried, and stared at Mr. Grant resentfully. "I don't feel that I can take anything which he has given. I don't care what instructions he has left or what his wishes were. Mr. Renshaw is my counsel. He will conduct my case."

The old lawyer took his departure, heavy of heart as a result of the painful duty he had been called on to perform. He left trouble, extra weighted with disappointment, behind him; and this seemed to him the more grievous in view of the terrible ordeal facing Chaffery's daughter on the morrow. Despite her out-

burst, he intended to be present during the hearing of the case and to watch over her interests.

"I never thought father would be so vindictive as that," Iris said to her husband when they were alone. "It was a perfectly vile thing for him to have done. Regretted it! I don't believe he knew any regret."

Nigel stared moodily out of the window. He was feeling very bitter and disappointed.

"If he stated his intention to make a new will," he rejoined, "that was good enough, and Grant should have flung that one on the fire before or after his collapse. Anyone but a legal-minded old fossil would have done so. It is an iniquitous will. You ought to fight it."

"That wouldn't do much good," she returned wearily. "As for me, I don't care. No amount of money can help me at present, and the future is too uncertain to be worth considering. He said we shouldn't touch his money, and we shan't."

"You may," Nigel reminded her.

"Ah, my dear!" She put her arms about his neck and looked at him with a wonderful softness in her eyes. "What use would I have for money, or for anything, if you were not here?"

He responded to her softened mood. In that moment, closely clasped in his embrace, love surged up in her heart and strove against the painful emotions of anger and fear, which had held sway there, and temporarily overwhelmed these.

## XXVIII

THE morrow dawned with all the dark horror of the coming ordeal, so paralysing in anticipation, wearing down Iris's spirit, till her mind, dazed and inactive, was governed by one thought alone, that she must save Nigel from prison, the walls of which would surely close upon herself.

On Renshaw, in their final consultation before the case opened, she impressed this very urgently.

"It is the only thing you can do for me, Mark," she enjoined him earnestly. "You cannot save me. But you must help me to establish his innocence beyond a breath of suspicion even. He knew nothing. The blame is mine entirely."

The incontestable truth of her assertion that he was powerless to prove her innocent of attempted fraud, was most disturbing to Renshaw on account of his love for her. During these days when he had seen much of her, had been taken into her most intimate confidence, had acted in the capacity of both counsel and friend, his love had developed from a restrained emotion to a very deep and compelling passion which affected all his thoughts and actions in relation to her. Whatever commands she laid on him he knew he would inevitably acquiesce in, no matter how greatly his inclination went against this. He had no greater



faith in Nigel's innocence than Mr. Chaffery had possessed. His opinion of Nigel had never stood very high ; it fell very low before the trial was ended.

He saw no reason to believe Iris's statement that she acted in selling the pictures without her husband's knowledge. So well was he acquainted with them and with the terms of frank and happy comradeship on which their marriage was based, that he felt her assertion to be inconsistent with these confidential relations. It might deceive the Court ; it could not deceive him. But the strength of her love which, notwithstanding the distressed state of her mind, could rise above her fears for her personal safety in defence of her husband, hit him hard. Her one thought was for Nigel. It seemed, as the case progressed, as though her fear for herself left her to become concentrated in fear for him.

Nigel's attitude impressed the Court most favourably. The silence he maintained, making no effort in his own defence—which indeed was not necessary since counsel for the defence undertook that very ably—created a strong feeling of sympathy, not unmingled with admiration ; the tone of which later coloured the newspaper reports and won for him outside a warm appreciation, inclining those who held it to over-estimate the fine quality of his behaviour, and to pity him the possession of a wife who had brought disgrace upon him.

For Iris, although her beauty and distress swayed many to sympathy, as her plea of ignorance found credence with a few, the verdict was a foregone conclusion. The eloquence of Mark Renshaw, who distinguished himself in his able speech for the defence,



moved his listeners to pity for the accused woman, who, a slender, drooping figure pathetic in her deep mourning, claimed their indulgence on account of her youth, her beauty, and her sorrowful position. Her counsel spoke eloquently for her and with a pleasing restraint which appealed very forcibly. If sympathy could have availed against justice she would have left the court with her husband a free woman, following the three days' trial, which ended in a verdict of guilty against her alone. The plea of ignorance, her counsel's persuasive eloquence in insisting on it, was so far helpful towards mitigating her sentence that a term of two years penal servitude was imposed, a lenient sentence; but to Iris, who heard it like a woman dazed, it sounded a death-knell to hope.

The prison walls were as the walls of a tomb which would enclose her living self. She could think of no future, see no picture of any future, following those two dead years.

Nigel, acquitted, with no stain on his character, with indeed a sense of congratulatory sympathy in the tense surrounding atmosphere, broke down on hearing his wife sentenced, and sobbed audibly. The sight and the sound of his distress proved the only means of rousing Iris from her stony calm: Her troubled gaze rested upon him, and from him turned appealingly to Mark Renshaw, who, with his hand upon hers, was trying to gain her attention.

"See to him, Mark," she whispered. "Take care of him."

Then, the emotions of the day proving too great

for her to sustain longer, she fainted and was carried below.

Her final instructions to Renshaw were the only directions she had given him which he failed to carry out. Since he could serve her no further, he felt no interest in what became of Hennelly. The man could look after himself very well. He had always succeeded in doing that if he had failed in other respects.

Renshaw felt bitter against him ; and he knew that this dislike arose, less on account of the unheroic figure which Hennelly cut in his eyes—possibly in his eyes alone—than because he was the husband of the woman he loved. He was amazed at the fierceness of the jealousy which moved him against Nigel, a jealousy that sprung from the realization of how strong was the love which the woman had for this man, a love fine and unselfish in quality, which would shelter him from every ill.

Nigel was allowed to see his wife. And when she came out of her swoon, which was brief, as though fate begrudged her even this short respite from her mental anguish, her eyes opened to find him bending over her. In a moment his arms were round her and she was weeping with her face hidden against his breast.

“ I shall never come out,” she sobbed. “ Nigel, I know it. I shall die before two years elapse.”

“ Darling, don’t grieve so.” He put his mouth to her ear. “ I’ll move heaven and earth to obtain your release. It’s terrible. . . . Two years ! It’s unthinkable.”

“ I didn’t realize what I was doing,” she wailed. “ I

only wanted to keep the knowledge from father. That man—in court—he made me out to be a hardened thief. I'm not that, Nigel; I'm not that."

"I know, dearest. No one believes that."

"They do. It will all be in the newspapers. Everyone will cut me. My life is finished. It doesn't matter if I do die before the two years come to an end."

Thus, in the darkest hour of her life, the unimportant things still held prominent place in her thoughts.

Nigel endeavoured to comfort her; but she was beyond finding solace even in his kisses.

The parting with him, the long term of their separation was torture to her when she reflected on it. She clung to him as though she clung to her life, as though she feared with his departure life would end, as though, when finally he broke away from her, sobbing also, she felt death beside her waiting to claim her from love's warm embrace.

The scene with him made matters worse, intensified her anguish. Something had been said about an appeal. Nigel had spoken about appealing against her sentence. But she felt that this would be useless, nor was she prepared to suffer the mental agony of further publicity, even if Mark Renshaw proposed this. He did not make any such suggestion to her. To appeal against her sentence would have been futile and ill-advised. Nigel had probably ventured the suggestion by way of comfort. He had seized upon anything which offered a ray of hope, however thin a ray. His one wish was to lighten the greyness of despair which had settled upon her.

"I shall never know an hour's happiness until you return to me," he had told her.

And with her tear-wet lips on his, she had replied :

"I think I shall never know an hour's real happiness again."

That was how she felt. The darkness of despair, closing yet more heavily about her, shut out the prospect beyond those two terrible years.

Two years of prison life. . . . And she a prisoner. . . .

In her imagination hitherto a criminal had seemed to be a person beyond the pale, utterly low, shameless, despicable. It had never occurred to her that people like herself ever got to prison. Now all her views were undergoing change. She saw herself as a fly who had blundered into the web. Had she been a little cautious, more wide-eyed to this possible danger, she could have avoided it. She had blundered into it. She was not a criminal with criminal intent ; she was only a very stupid person who had taken a false step and lost the direct path. She had dug the grave of her own hope, and the best of her life lay buried in it.

Two years. . . . She would never spend two years in prison. She would surely die before the term expired.

## XXIX

THE Hennelly trial with its dramatic ending ; the imprisonment of Iris, the release of Nigel Hennelly, with no stain on his character, with indeed the added lustre with which sentiment invested his attitude of impressive silence, occupied public attention for a longer period than the ordinary social scandal. Sympathy with Nigel was general ; men expressed it in a warm grip of the hand when they met him, women with the friendly light in eyes which saw him in heroic pose and manifested their appreciation with soft glances of admiring and quickened interest. Only a few people shared the opinion which Renshaw held, that it was incredible that Hennelly should have known nothing about the matter.

In Hennelly's own secret mind he held himself as innocent as the court had proclaimed him to be. He had not moved in the matter ; his wife had acted, if not without his knowledge, wholly independently of him. He had not advised her one way or the other ; and in this he saw his only culpability. He ought to have opposed her action and so averted its terrible consequences. It was too late now to think of that ; but he reproached himself for negligence in his responsibility towards her, and this added to the sincere sorrow with which he grieved for her.

In those first days of his loneliness it appeared rather as if some terrible accident had befallen which had resulted in his wife's death. He could not visualize her in prison, or in fact as alive in any place where he could not have access to her. For the time she was in very truth dead to him ; it was so he thought of her. He was unable to imagine their reunion, or any future together. Their lives had crashed hopelessly, and he alone, broken and dazed, was able to crawl free of the debris to face a bleak and empty world.

For a while former friends held a little aloof, and for this he was grateful. He shrank rather from the sight of familiar faces. Just at first he went in some uncertainty as to his reception. He felt diffident on meeting an acquaintance casually, and experienced an almost painful embarrassment in responding to a friendly greeting.

Not at once did people invite him to their homes. As though by tacit agreement he was allowed to remain in the position of isolation which anyone bereaved would be accorded. Later, after what Mona termed the elapse of a decent interval, during which public curiosity had time to die down, he began to be seen once more at private entertainments, and by slow and sometimes awkward processes gradually resumed his former life. Time blunted the keenness of his sense of disgrace ; and, while his sorrow on his wife's account remained deep, he became accustomed to her absence, and was even able to put the sadness of his thought of her aside for periods of ever increasing duration. He found it necessary sometimes to snatch at the



memory of her and hold to it as to something elusive which by right he should retain.

There were occasions when a temporary light-heartedness cheated him into forgetfulness of Iris and her sad condition, when he was tempted to yet deeper oblivion, for which later he scorned himself. He would pull himself up abruptly, abashed by his callous neglect of his wife's memory when faithfulness in thought was all he could show her of love. He reproached himself with exceeding bitterness.

But the disposition of the man inclined inevitably towards pleasure; it was impossible for him to remain in a state of continued depression.

No one ever mentioned Iris to him, except once soon after the trial when Mona, at whose house he first visited, spoke of her.

"Poor Iris!" she said. "I can't believe she understood what she was doing. She must be suffering terribly. And it will be appalling for her when she comes out. You ought to take her abroad."

"I would, if I could afford it," he replied. "But my job's here."

"That vindictive old father of hers," Mona resumed, "dying worth millions and leaving her nothing. There ought to be a law by which the members of a family are entitled to participate in the family fortune. If he'd made a decent will you could have lived abroad comfortably and no one would have thought anything more about it. Here in London everybody *knows*. It's dreadful."

She made it clear to him that however kind people



might be to himself, his wife could never hope to be received again.

“ I wanted to go to her right at the beginning,” she said. “ Of course I never believed for one moment she had done what they said ; I was positive it would prove to be some mistake. But Richard wouldn’t hear of my doing anything of the sort. He was quite nasty with me. Poor Iris ! Her life is over.”

That was the prevailing opinion. Though many of his former friends rallied round Hennelly, it was plain that their kindness would not be extended to his wife. With her release he would be compelled to share the isolation of her position or live to a large extent independently of her.

In the early days of their separation he was for sharing with her in all things ; but later his sensibilities became blunted. He saw himself as one ill used by circumstances. His wife, whom he dearly loved, had brought disgrace upon him ; and though his love for her remained unchanged, it seemed to him unnecessary that his life should lose itself in the ruin she had made of her own.

Had old Chaffery left his daughter a legacy which she might have enjoyed on her release, he would gladly have thrown up everything for her sake and gone to some new country with her, where under another name they might have begun afresh and put the past behind them finally. But the old brute had left an evil will. It made Nigel furious when he reflected on that magnificent sum of one hundred thousand pounds which he might never touch. It was the brain of a devil which

had conceived such a condition. One hundred thousand pounds. With such a fortune they could have faced the world and braved its criticism. Gold smooths the way and opens many doors.

But fortune was not for him. He felt rather as though he had been cheated of his rights; as though in his marriage he had been imposed on. It seemed he had made a sorry bargain all round.

With such thoughts breeding in his brain it was not surprising that, as week by week went by, and month after month passed, lessening daily the term of her weary punishment, his grief for his wife faded before these callous sentiments, which finally ousted it altogether. From considering himself hardly used he came in time to regard his position much as a few of his more intimate and personal friends regarded it, as that of a man whose prospects were ruined through no fault of his own.

As his attitude became increasingly indifferent towards her so it became less bitter for him to think of Iris in prison; it was indeed possible not to think of her at all. He consoled himself after his own fashion in her absence, easing a none too tender conscience for his infidelity by reflecting on the injustice of his lot, which left him, a young man still and popular beyond the ordinary, disgraced and ruined by the wife he loved.

That he did love her in spite of this condoned he felt much that was unworthy in his behaviour. Never once did he experience shame for himself, or for the hypocrisy of his thoughts; practised as he was in

the art of self-deception he failed to recognize their dissimulation.

Thus as time passed he came to a way of living which held its compensations. How great these were he scarcely realized, until very unexpectedly before the first year of her term was expired Iris was released from prison on account of ill health. She had declared she never would live two years in prison, and this seemed likely in view of her release.

### XXX

THE state of Iris's health required her instant removal to a nursing-home. This solved the immediate difficulty of her accommodation. Nigel had sublet their flat for two years, and was living in bachelor chambers himself; his wife's unforeseen release made this arrangement unsuitable. He had to set about finding a new home to which to take her as soon as she was well enough—if she ever was well enough. When he saw her it occurred to Nigel that she was slipping into a decline. She looked very ill indeed, and was too weak to walk. Fretting had reduced her to a shadow of her former self. There was no doubt that had she not been released she must have died.

Nigel was shocked on seeing her. He scarcely recognized in the wasted figure and sunken features the slim grace and clear healthful beauty of his wife as he had known her before her incarceration. Ill health and much grieving had robbed her of her beauty. Her skin, once so clear and fine, was grey and leaden-hued, the cheeks had fallen in, and dark hollows encircled the eyes which, deep set in their sunken sockets, appeared too big for her face. He was horrified at the sight of her. As he bent over her and kissed her pallid lips he felt her tears, great scalding tears, wet upon his cheek.

“ O Nigel ! ” she murmured. And again presently :  
“ O Nigel ! ”

After that she wept quietly in a manner distressing to see.

Her temperature ran up alarmingly when she had been put to bed in the nursing-home. But later on she slept ; and her improvement when next he saw her was marked. He was not permitted to be with her much, and was warned against any reference to her recent experiences. The great thing was to keep her quiet and distract her thoughts as far as possible from the past.

Every evening he called at the nursing-home, and usually sat with her awhile. If she was not so well they sent him away without allowing him to see her. The doctor who had attended Mr. Chaffery, attended Iris now. He had known her since she was a child, and had seen her through a few childish ailments. Her wonderful health had made no demands on his care of late years. But now that health was broken, and she lay, a feeble listless figure, showing no interest in life and none in her recovery. It was rousing she needed, stimulating to renewed zest in life ; that and rest alone could restore her to perfect health.

“ As soon as she is equal to the journey you must take her away,” he said to Nigel.

“ Take her where ? ” Nigel asked.

“ Anywhere out of England. Take her in search of sunshine. That’s what she needs.”

“ I am afraid it is out of the question—for me to go,” Nigel said. “ I can’t leave my job.”

"That's regrettable. I can't say anything more. You know your own business best."

How useful some of the Chaffery millions would come in here, the doctor thought, recalling Mr. Chaffery's death on the point of making a will which was never executed. It wasn't just for a man to die and leave his daughter nothing.

The only person who called at the nursing-home to inquire after Iris was Renshaw. He called several times before he was allowed to see her. He took her flowers, great masses of roses and irises ; her room was gay with these gifts always.

His first visit was made within a few days of her arrival at the home, when she was still too ill to take any interest in his inquiries or in the gift of roses which he brought. But later, when these floral gifts arrived with generous regularity, she evinced pleasure in them. His were the only flowers she received.

Nigel, coming in one day and finding her room decorated with bowls of purple irises and deep red roses, remarked on their profusion. He had not thought himself of bringing flowers. It surprised him when he learned from whom they came.

"Mark left them," she explained.

"Renshaw ! Has he been ?" Nigel's interest in the flowers flagged. He seated himself in the chair beside her bed and possessed himself of the thin hand lying listlessly upon the counterpane. He stroked her hand. "No need for me to bring flowers, that's evident," he said.

She smiled wanly. The smallest posy from his hand

would have given her greater pleasure than the choicest blooms which money could procure.

“ I ought to feel properly jealous,” he added.

Iris remembered the days when he would have been jealous. Those days appeared far away, and yet as time is reckoned they were not very remote. But in no one would she inspire jealousy any more, or great love ; she had lost her beauty, her attraction, everything. So she thought, gazing with her big sad eyes into Nigel's face for a sign of the old passion, which once had kindled there for love of her. He was kind, very kind always, and indulgent as one is kind and indulgent to a sick person ; he showed none of the terrible anxiety which a great love would have betrayed at sight of her weakness. She was keenly sensitive to the subtle change in him. Perhaps in the morbid state of her mind she exaggerated this and imagined as existing the conditions she expected to find in him. She had spoilt her own life ; she had herself only to blame. And she had dragged him down. He would feel that. How could he help resenting it against her ? He would be more than human if he did not resent it.

So her poor brain reasoned, and overlooked the fact that morally he was to blame equally with her.

On one occasion when he sat beside her, when she had grown stronger and was able to sit up in bed, pale as a lily, but with some return of healthiness to her skin, she made a first reference to her imprisonment. It was evident that the memory of that time was never far away from her mind.



"It isn't the hardship so much," she said. "It isn't what one endures in that sense; it's the disgrace which matters—because it clings. It's in the pores of my skin, the prison atmosphere; I believe it is in my soul. I'll never get free of it."

"You mustn't grow morbid," he told her. "You must learn to put it behind you."

"That isn't possible. You know that isn't possible," she rejoined. "The world won't let me, even if I could. Who will know me now? . . . Mark. . . . The one staunch friend of all the crowd I knew." Her eyes rested wistfully on the profusion of flowers on a table beside her bed. "He calls regularly. The next time I shall see him."

"Very decent of him," Nigel said carelessly. "But then we all knew Mark was fond of you. That explains a sort of coolness he shows for me. I'm not minding that; it's natural. If he had won you I suppose I should have felt the same towards him."

"I've not proved a lucky win for you anyway," she said.

He patted her hand.

"You mean, your luck's out," he returned. "But, old thing, you are you just the same. Don't you worry. We are going to have no end of a time when you are strong again."

But Iris, whose thoughts were preoccupied with her troubles, could not then look hopefully into the future.

"I've thought Mona might have been to see me. We were great pals," she said presently. "I would have wanted to see her if our positions had been

reversed. It wouldn't have made all that difference to me."

"It's not Mona's fault; it's that prig of a husband of hers. She would come if she could."

"You see her still?"

"Oh yes," he replied thoughtlessly. "She's been a brick to me. She knew how I'd miss you, and she took me under her wing from the start."

"Yes."

Her tone sounded tired and dispirited. She leaned listlessly against her pillows, with half-closed eyes that showed no interest in anything on which their gaze rested. Nigel, with that insensitiveness which rendered him obtuse always in regard to the feelings of others, was unaware of any cause for pain in the information he offered concerning his doings. He talked to her freely about people she used to know, who knew him still, were kind to him, yet made no inquiries for her, evinced no interest in her whatsoever.

His talk stabbed her cruelly. But her resentment was not against him, only against these friends who proved how lightly were the roots of their friendship planted.

"I'm glad they haven't turned you down," she said. "That would have been intolerable. I could not have endured that. And the Mellors? Do you visit there?"

"No." He shook his head. "Lady Mary is unapproachable. But the old boy is cordial. He's been frightfully kind. I feared at one time I might lose my job; but that was all right."

Her eyes flashed open abruptly.

"That would have been a great injustice. Why should you lose it? There was nothing against you. You can't help the possession of a worthless wife."

Suddenly she broke down and wept bitterly into the pillow.

"I've ruined you. I'm no good to you. But, O my dear, I love you so. . . ."

A nurse came into the room later and discovered her weeping in his arms.

## XXXI

THERE came to Iris sometimes when she lay awake at night strange thoughts and fancies which would not have visited her when in a normal state of health. It seemed to her that she herself had perished, had been destroyed, as the pictures were destroyed, by some consuming power that had left no vestige of her former personality. The thing she was now, which suffered and knew shame and humiliation, and had not the power to draw love to herself, or hold love, or even win love back to her, was the product of the prison-house ; the nerveless, sexless, apathetic result of a system which punished eternally through the brand of shame which burned through brain and body tissues into the soul ; shame that radiated, not as a bright flame, but as a scorching breath which seared what it came in contact with. She was a destructive influence to be avoided as that which harms ; doomed to walk alone through a world in which she had no place ; clinging like a dead weight to her husband, whose life was spoiled with hers.

Out of this forlorn reverie would spring a fierce resolve, in revolt against her own power for ill, to let Nigel go ; she would not hold to him and spoil his life. She would encourage him to go about among his friends and not concern himself with her miserable

existence. And she would be bright when he was with her and hide the ache of her poor heart from him. She would make his home a place where he would like to come when through with his pleasure and with the day's work. A place to rest in, where he would find her always loving and glad to have him with her. That was what was left to her. She would wrest some satisfaction from a life of self-sacrifice devoted to his happiness.

Such comfort as was to be derived from this resolve she seized. It afforded her an anchorage, gave her a definite aim, something to strive after. She would not further handicap Nigel but would efface herself and find her happiness in his.

Following a moment of exalted thought such as this, Mark Renshaw called one day and was admitted to see her. Although he found her brighter and better than usual, with the light of her new resolve kindling in her eyes, his first thought was that she looked very ill indeed. Prepared as he was to find her changed by ill-health and her painful experiences, he had not expected to see her a mere shadow of her former self. It was like looking on the ghost of Iris ; the flesh robbed of its beauty in its transition from life to death.

An emotion of pity and tenderness stirred him at sight of her. There was something peculiarly arresting and appealing in the wistful quality of her look behind her welcoming smile. He walked up to the bed and dropped his roses upon it and took her little thin hand in his.

“ Mark ! ”

"Iris! My dear." He touched her hand with his lips.

"I've been aching to see you," she said. "At first they wouldn't let me; and then——"

She flushed, and averting her eyes from his too persistent gaze, fell to fingering the roses strewn over the counterpane.

"You've been awfully sweet to me, Mark. I've loved the flowers."

"I'm still waiting," he said, "to hear why the veto wasn't raised until to-day?"

She smiled shyly at him.

"I was afraid."

"Of what?" he asked.

"I wanted to get well before I saw you. I'm just a scarecrow."

He took a seat beside the bed, wondering, while his kind quiet eyes scrutinized her attentively, whether he had shown in his look on seeing her how greatly the change in her shocked him? He hoped this was not so.

"We might all serve the purpose of scaring crows if we tried, I suppose," he said. "I think at present you look too frail to scare anything. You don't scare me anyhow. But if I had anything to do with you, I would treat you as they do the poultry for Christmas."

"Kill me?" she suggested.

"You know very well that was not my meaning. Fatten you was what I intended to convey."

"I am putting on weight," she said, and lifted the roses and laid them against her face.

He watched her curiously. Her action in doing this recalled a touch of the old coquetry he had often admired in her.

"Are they not lovely?" she said. "They smell so good. These things mean so much to me now. A few roses. . . . What were they formerly? One had so much. The flowers which you have sent me have been as a ray of sunshine. I'd like to get down into the country and see roses growing again."

"That shouldn't be difficult to accomplish, when you are stronger," he said.

"If Nigel is able to take me."

"If he doesn't, I will."

She laughed softly.

"You are a dear. I adore you." Her eyes were more than kind. "I'm hungering to get into Devonshire, where the soil and the cattle are red, and there are dog roses in the hedges, and cream, and cider to drink." Then breaking off abruptly, she sighed. "I suppose I should trail my memories with me there too."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't. Be sensible; put such thoughts behind you altogether."

"I wish I could drink of the waters of Lethe. If only some good fairy could wipe out the past from my memory! I would like to start anew, remembering nothing which had been."

"It would complicate the present somewhat," he said. "Why not be your own good fairy? I think you might help yourself better than anyone else could do. If you cease fretting you will pick up quicker.



I want you to hurry up and get well. I want to come and see you in your own home again. The rules and regulations here scare me stiff."

She looked amused.

"You didn't come to see me often when I had my home," she reproached him.

"Didn't I? The reference you made just now to your appreciation of roses applies here. You had so much; you valued your friends less on account of their numbers."

"Not you, Mark. Never you."

"That's rather nice. Anyhow, I could seldom get you to myself."

"And now you know you will," she returned. His words recalled how few friends there were left—only himself, so far as she knew. "The crowd has melted away."

"That was a stupid thing for me to say," he exclaimed with contrition. "At least, there is no value in friendship which can desert you now. The meanness of humanity is appalling; but there are some people with decent minds and generous instincts. The friends you make now will be your best friends."

She shook her head.

"There won't be any—only you," she insisted. "Do you suppose I don't know? I've faced the thought out in my quiet moments. It's no use, Mark; I'm branded. No one will want to know me now. Why should anyone? I'm poor and discredited. I'm just a drag on Nigel. I've been nothing but a handicap all along to him."

“ Does he think so ? ”

Renshaw's tone did not betray the emotions of anger and disgust which he experienced at the idea of Nigel finding her a handicap. Rather had he been a drag on her. He kept his feelings under control, but he resented her attitude in regard to Nigel.

“ I don't know what he thinks,” she said. “ I only know it is so. He hides a good deal from me ; but I am sure he must feel it as I do. You don't know, old Mark, what it feels like to have something like this in the family. The grinning skeleton in the cupboard, with the cupboard door half open. I try not to think of these things ; but always my mind swings back. I can't shut the cupboard door on the leering thing inside.”

“ You'll think differently when you are stronger,” he said. “ There isn't any skeleton there really. I'll ransack that cupboard for you some day and show you it's only a bogey of your imagination.”

“ Dear old Mark ! ” She stretched a hand to him. “ I don't want to be depressing on your first visit. Turn my thoughts to something lighter. Tell me of yourself. You are growing famous. You will be frightfully rich and important one day. Nigel says you are making your mark.” She laughed. “ That sounds like a pun. I'm coming on when I can rise to puns.”

“ You're a dear,” he said, and patted the hand he held.

Glancing up at him and meeting the affection of his look, Iris suddenly voiced what it was in her mind

to say, the thing uppermost in her thoughts, which she had been wanting to say all along.

"Mark, I'll never be pretty again."

"You never were pretty," he answered unexpectedly.

"It's too commonplace a term altogether to describe your beauty."

"You say such nice things." She played with her roses and refrained from looking at him. "I think you are one of those people who don't set great store on beauty."

"I'm very much like other men in that respect, I think," he said. "But beauty isn't everything. There are qualities I value more."

Very greatly to her surprise, he leaned suddenly above her, and with a swift swoop, as though moved by some irresistible impulse, he flung himself upon her, caught her in his arms, held her, and kissed her lips.

## XXXII

**I**RIS was taken altogether by surprise. Mark Renshaw's act was so unexpected. She had never thought of Mark doing that, never thought of him as wanting to do it. A sudden constraint fell between them. She felt awkward. Men had wanted to kiss her often, both before and since her marriage ; some of them had kissed her ; she had not minded particularly or thought much about it. But Mark was different. And his kisses were different. Also he had taken her at a disadvantage ; she had been unable to protect herself. She felt shy and inarticulate. She could not she found rebuke him.

Renshaw likewise appeared overcome with embarrassment. He offered no apology. There was indeed an air of defiant triumph about him. He left her a little abruptly, taking no proper leave of her. That too was odd, and left her thoughtful.

She found later that she could not speak of this to Nigel. Not that she feared Nigel would be jealous ; but she did not want to tell him ; she did not want to hear him laugh. There was an unacknowledged antagonism between the two men. Perhaps because of the preference Mr. Chaffery had shown him. Nigel had always disliked Mark. Iris had no wish to listen to disparaging comments on his behaviour ; so,

although she referred to his visit when Nigel came in, it was only a casual allusion ; the roses, massed in a bowl beside her bed, witnessed more eloquently to his having been there.

Renshaw became a regular visitor from that time. Always when he came, and while he was with her, there hung between them an intangible something which acted as a barrier of reserve. He was as conscious of this as Iris was, and quite as embarrassed by it ; but he was incapable of removing this constraint. The woman who lay in the bed, hollow-eyed and sunken of cheek, was inexpressibly dear to him. He had never loved handsome laughing Iris Chaffery as he loved this poor broken Iris, whose frail loveliness was battered with adverse winds. She was to him like a flower that had been trampled on, a thing tender and sweet and crushed which he wanted to care for and cherish until the drooping petals revived. He had an almost irresistible desire whenever he was near her to take her in his arms and hold her against his heart, as he had seized and held her on the occasion of his first visit, when, standing beside her bed, looking down at the little pinched face, sallow against the whiteness of the pillow, he had been deeply moved by the tragic wistfulness of the big dark eyes, the pathos of their appeal for sympathy.

It mattered nothing to him what she had done or how she looked ; she was just Iris, the girl he loved. Her marriage, which formerly had seemed to separate her from him entirely, mattered less now. That was a point which puzzled him. Nothing was materially

altered, and yet something had changed the aspect of things. These conditions were too subtle for analysis but they made themselves felt. He believed she was conscious herself of this indefinable change. He was so observant of her that he read her more easily than she was aware.

Iris certainly realized a difference in the quality of her husband's affection for her. She felt that possibly her ill-health accounted for this. She entertained no doubt of him. When she was well again they would take up their lives together as before.

That her absence could have made any marked difference in his feeling for her did not occur to her. People did not change in a year. But the conditions had changed. Nigel had attained to a complete independence of her. Her unexpected return, with its attendant complications, proved embarrassing to him. To Renshaw, familiar to some extent with the life Nigel was leading, this embarrassment was understandable. He supposed that Hennelly would attempt some readjustment, would show satisfaction in his wife's release; he must be glad to have her with him again. That he would neglect her and follow his own life independently of her was inconceivable.

Iris herself was responsible to some extent for this neglect on his part. In her earnest desire not to be a drag on him, not to spoil his life further, she encouraged him in his selfish attitude; her thought for him fostered his worse qualities.

Hennelly rented a furnished flat in Lancaster Gate; quite a small flat and less expensive than their former

home, but it was more convenient, he explained, than living so far out. It mattered nothing to Iris where they lived, so long as they were together. She was eager to get into the flat and start housekeeping again.

It was a wild bright day in March when she left the nursing-home and drove with Nigel to their new home. She was so pleased and excited over everything that she failed to notice the inconveniences of the flat, which besides being small and scantily furnished, was on the fourth floor. What did that matter when there was the lift? It was home, freedom; she was back in the world again with her own man.

The servant whom Nigel had engaged through the medium of an agency, was not as smart as their former maid or so efficient; but, as Nigel explained also, she was cheaper. Everything was cheaper. He was cutting down expenses wherever possible, which meant in every way which did not inconvenience himself. Economy was necessary. The golden vision of Mr. Chaffery's wealth no longer shone as a mirage on their horizon. It was significant what a change the fading of that mirage made. It was as though the value of his wife had fallen, like the depreciation of a bankrupt nation's currency though its face value remains unchanged, with the absence of the golden setting which once had enhanced it. With the Chaffery millions shining in a golden distance Hennelly's respect for his wife had been kept active; the chances were it would never have paled had the vision of wealth not vanished so utterly. Iris, poor, plain, ill and discredited, excited



in him no admiration and very little tenderness. He was impatient with her, intolerant of her weakness, and increasingly sorry for himself in being handicapped with the possession of a wife who had ceased to be a pride and helpmate to him. His one-time passion for her was dead, and the steadier love which springs from the best kind of passion, which had never burned very brightly with him, was dying likewise. Iris, as yet only dimly apprehending some change in him, was blinded to his faults by her love for him.

"It's wonderful to be back with you, dear," she whispered. "I never thought I could feel so really happy again. But I've got you; that means everything."

Later, in the bedroom, running a comb through the dark waves of her hair, she regarded her reflection critically in the mirror. There were one or two white threads among the dark hair.

"Look, Nigel! Grey hairs," she said.

"Pull them out," he advised.

She turned round and faced him.

"I'm growing old and plain."

"You'll improve as you grow stronger," he returned, appearing restive under her gaze. Why need she draw attention to what was unpleasantly obvious? "You are only a bag of bones at present."

"How will you like having a plain wife?" she persisted, with those disconcerting big eyes of hers holding his. "You've always expressed dislike for plain faces."

"When they don't belong to my wife," he replied.

"But I expect I can tolerate yours, old thing. You only need feeding up; then you'll be all right. Don't, for God's sake, start worrying about your looks."

Visions of her visiting a beauty specialist troubled him. That sort of thing was expensive; but she would do it, if she thought it would improve matters.

"I only mind for your sake," she said, and smiled upon him with a flash of her old gaiety. "I should hate it if anyone mistook me for your mother."

He grinned, and putting an arm about her led her back to the sitting-room, where the inefficient maid was arranging the tea-table on which an electric kettle was singing cheerfully. The sun streamed in through the window and brightened everything.

"Isn't it jolly?" Iris said. "I'm just loving the thought of making tea again. Take the comfiest chair while I do it—if I haven't forgotten how."

She laughed while she spoke, but two bright drops shone in her eyes, unseen by him, and dropped on to the carpet when she turned aside her face. The excitement of the move was rather much for her.

### XXXIII

**I**RIS mended slowly. Her health was restored sooner than her looks; the slower improvement in her appearance being the result doubtless of fretting. She fretted over many things. And she was lonely. All day Nigel was away at his office. Although in the past habit had accustomed her to his absence, she felt the deprivation of his company more now since her former occupations and distractions were denied her. Her friends had deserted her. She was alone always. There was nothing to do except visit shops or theatres or concert halls; and no one to accompany her to these, save occasionally Mark.

Renshaw, visiting her at the flat with almost the same regularity with which he had visited her at the nursing-home, and discovering that she was as much alone now as then, rather more so, charged himself with the business of taking her out. He fell into the habit of ringing her up to inquire if she needed an escort.

It became very evident that this arrangement was entirely agreeable to Nigel. Nigel went out in the evenings very frequently. He had been eloquent in excuses immediately following his wife's return, had sought to explain these excursions; it was difficult to break away abruptly from people who had been

kind to him during her absence. And for the present she needed rest. He advised going to bed early. When he left her in bed he felt easy in his mind concerning her.

At first she acquiesced in this because she saw it pleased him; but after a while she put him off by promising to go to bed early, and stayed up, and, except when Mark called, spent long lonely evenings reading. She was always in bed and often feigning sleep when he returned.

She encouraged him in this extremely selfish course, so anxious was she that her disgrace should not overshadow him. She was desperately afraid of being a drag on him. But his willingness to leave her hurt. And the loneliness of those evenings when he was absent sometimes well into the small hours of the morning, was terrible. There was no one but herself in the flat; the inefficient maid slept out. Nigel, aware when he left her thus, that she was entirely alone, was sometimes ashamed of himself, particularly in the early days of her return; but since she never reproached him that feeling speedily evaporated. He persuaded himself into the belief that physically she needed rest and was glad of the quiet, glad in short to be rid of him, and to know that he was not having too thin a time.

On the whole, he reflected, it was a good thing she saw it like that, since it was out of the question for him to give up all his friends because they would not include her. Her sensible attitude towards the whole matter relieved him greatly. It rather pleased him

when Mark Renshaw stepped again into the picture, took in fact quite a prominent place in it. He was not jealous of Renshaw ; and it made things pleasanter for Iris. Renshaw took an amount of responsibility off his shoulders.

Renshaw, visiting her with even greater frequency, adopted the habit of taking her out in Nigel's absence. Hennelly neglected his wife ; that was all too evident ; since he valued so lightly what he, himself, valued above everything, there was no one to question his right to serve her. She was lonely ; so was he ; their company was helpful to one another.

So the thing began. At first Iris was unconscious of this watchful tenderness on his part. She liked his coming ; he helped her through many an evening which would otherwise have been desperately dull. She attempted to deceive him in regard to Nigel's absences, and believed for a long time that he accepted the plausible reasons she invented to excuse his selfishness. She found it so easy to deceive herself where Nigel was concerned that she supposed he too accepted her explanations. Only sometimes she was a little restive under his scrutiny ; and the excuses and explanations became more urgent.

" I make him go, Mark," she said once in tones that were curiously wistful. " He hates leaving me alone ; but I make him. I can't bear to think that he should give up everything for me."

It occurred to Renshaw that he gave up very little, but he said nothing as to that.

" Oh, if you want him to ! " he said, and was quiet

for a moment ; during which pregnant fraction of time they looked at one another inquiringly, and then Iris averted her gaze.

“ I don’t want to spoil his life utterly,” she said.

“ I should say that wasn’t possible—for you to do,” he replied, with an odd little pause in the sentence which pointed its significance.

On that occasion he took her to the theatre. He would have preferred to spend the evening at the flat, but was afraid to trust himself alone with her. He used the telephone and secured a couple of stalls for the Strand Theatre. At first Iris demurred. She was shy of being seen in public. But Renshaw overruled her objections ; it was better for her to get accustomed to this, he thought.

There were quite a number of people whom she used to know present in the theatre. Iris was conscious of being under surveillance. It was embarrassing and rather humiliating, but she kept up the fiction before Renshaw of noticing nothing. He was not blind himself to the interest their appearance together caused ; the beautiful and notorious Mrs. Hennelly with her defending counsel. Doubtless people would find a lot to say about that, and her husband would be accorded further undeserved sympathy.

He drove back with her after the performance to the flat in Lancaster Gate. He opened the door for her and followed her inside. Nigel had not returned ; Iris, who had not expected him, made pretence however of thinking it possible that he was back.

“ Come in and see if he’s home,” she said. When



they found the sitting-room untenanted and the place in darkness, she remarked brightly: "He's not back. Will you sit down and wait? He may come in any minute."

That too was fiction. She knew from experience it would be hours before he returned. Renshaw said the first thing that presented itself in a moment of extreme embarrassment.

"That's too uncertain," he said. "I won't wait."

He turned to go, but came back and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"Iris," he said, and looked into her upturned eyes, "you can't deceive me, my dear. Don't try to. I want to be a help to you. I don't want you to try to throw dust in my eyes."

"What do you mean?" she said, and seemed so near to weeping that he refrained from saying what exactly he did mean. He removed his hands from her shoulders abruptly.

"I'll come for you again to-morrow evening," he said.

"No, Mark."

"Yes. Don't deny a lonely man the pleasure of your company." Then he said an unexpected thing. "Tell Nigel. Tell him I'm coming for you every evening I'm free. That will give him something to think about."

He said good night and went away rather hurriedly; and for a long while after he had gone Iris sat quite still, thinking about him, about what he had said; about her life under its changed conditions, about



Nigel, and the complications which Mark's interest in her promised. It would have pleased her if her husband had shown some resentment at Mark's attentiveness. But Nigel had no cause for jealousy and was aware of this. It would not have been entirely disagreeable to him at that time to have learnt that she had been a little imprudent. It would have helped to reinstate himself in his own esteem.

The release of his wife from prison so long before he had expected to see her was secretly an embarrassment to Nigel. In her absence he had become entangled in a manner which he found now it was not easy to straighten out. Moreover, he was not particularly keen on freeing himself. The glamour of a thing newly begun held him captive ; he was reluctant to break his bonds. But the dual life with its necessary deceptions proved harassing. And the demands which love made, the particular form of love in which he was experimenting, drew heavily on his pocket.

He knew he was a scoundrel, that his wife was delicate and needed care and affection and companionship ; and he gave her none of these. He knew she ought to go away out of England for change of air and scene ; and the lure of a common intrigue held him chained with shackles he could not break, which he did not wish to break. Bright eyes, a mop of fair hair, a pair of young voluptuous lips, had made a slave of him.

## XXXIV

IT was the day before Iris's birthday, for which reason doubtless her mind was filled with pleasurable anticipation while she stood gazing with wide surprised eyes upon a trinket which she held in her hands. She had come upon this inadvertently while brushing her husband's coat ; the little case had fallen from one of his pockets and opened ; on stooping to recover it she found a diamond and opal pendant inside. She stood with the case in her hand, looking at the pretty thing in delighted astonishment. So Nigel had remembered ! She had wondered whether he would. He needed prompting generally in the matter of dates.

But why opals ? There was ill-luck in opals ; and he knew that she was superstitious.

She snapped the case on the jewel hastily and replaced it in the pocket from which it had fallen. It would not do to let him suspect that she had discovered his surprise. But the discovery gave her so much pleasure that, although Nigel was away all day and again in the evening, the time passed happily for her. She went to bed early in order to bring the morrow sooner ; and in the morning, waking fresh and pleasantly expectant, she rose early and dressed with particular care and with a view to suiting her frock to diamonds and opals in the morning.

She ordered a special breakfast and looked to the table appointments and put Nigel's letters on the table beside his plate. He came in late, kissed her perfunctorily, and sat down and turned over his letters hurriedly.

A little chill of disappointment came over her. Had he forgotten? Possibly in the haste of rising the importance of the date had slipped his memory. He would think of it later. Perhaps he would telephone to her. Or he might hasten home and take her out somewhere.

She sat down and poured out his coffee and passed what he required to him, while he ate abstractedly and read his mail. She might have been not there for all the attention he paid her. He will remember later and be sorry, she told herself. But the chill of disappointment made itself increasingly felt.

How could he forget when he had bought her a present? When he had that present in his pocket?

Never a doubt crossed her mind that the jewel she had seen was intended for her. For whom else would he buy expensive presents? That in the pursuit of his own pleasure he neglected her she unwillingly recognized, but no suspicion of a transference of his affections troubled her. That was something she would not have conceived possible.

She helped him on with his overcoat when he was ready to leave and kissed him affectionately before opening the door of the flat for him.

"You'll come home early to-night?" she said.

"I don't know. Perhaps."

He broke from her detaining hands ; he was in a hurry ; he was late, and she kept him unnecessarily.

“ Try to be back early,” she urged. “ I’ll have a specially nice dinner for you.”

“ I’ll see what can be managed,” he said, and broke away and entered the lift.

Iris, heavy of heart and disappointed, shut the door and went back into the room where her half-finished breakfast confronted her. She had no appetite for it. He had forgotten. She wondered when he would remember ? On the floor beside his chair lay a sheet of notepaper with a business address upon it. She stooped for it. It was a jeweller’s invoice for a diamond and opal pendant set in platinum.

She held it in her hand and stared at it in amaze. The address was that of a well-known Bond Street firm, and the price of the pendant was three hundred guineas. This had come with the morning’s post. Nigel had opened it. How then could he have forgotten the present he had bought for her with this reminder, which he had most certainly seen ?

From amazement her expression changed to horror. Could it be possible that the pendant was not intended for her ? If not, what was he doing with it ? Why should he buy a three hundred guinea piece of jewellery if it was not for his wife ?

She dropped back into her chair and sat there with the paper in her hand and stared at it and forgot all about breakfast. The maid came in and cleared the table and asked her in friendly cockney accents if she wasn’t feeling well. She answered something at

random and got up and went into the bedroom. Later she placed the jeweller's invoice in a prominent position on the mantelshelf in the sitting-room. He would see it there when he came in.

All her pleasure in the day was gone ; the happy anticipation was turned to angry doubt. What was the meaning of it all ? Why had he bought this pendant if it was not meant for her ? She was resolved upon an explanation. She would ask him what that invoice meant, what he was doing with the pendant ?

Impatient of the hours which must intervene before his return, she went out. She drove to Bond Street, and dismissing the taxi, got out and in a spirit of morbid curiosity found the shop from which the pendant had come and stopped and looked in at the window. Then, half ashamed, as one caught in the act of spying, she went on and did some shopping on her own account. Her personal expenditure had fallen considerably of late. What use had she for beautiful clothes, since she went nowhere to display them ? It occurred to her now that she might wear them for her own satisfaction. She liked pretty things. Perhaps she was growing a little careless of her appearance. Perhaps this made a difference with Nigel. He had always liked to see her admired. Why should she not dress beautifully for him ?

She entered a shop where she had been in the habit of dealing. Ready money was scarce with her ; but she could have the things entered. The people knew her.

The people knew her. . . . The thought brought a

flush to her cheeks. They knew her ; she had been one of their most esteemed customers. But she had not entered the premises since the scandal of her imprisonment. She could not face the thought of entering then. The past rose up and hit her at every turn.

In trepidation lest she might be recognized she turned to leave the place, and stepping outside on to the pavement she came face to face with Mona, who, on the point of entering and taken unawares, paused irresolutely and went pink, and then stood still and gave a sort of gasp of astonishment.

“ Iris ! ” she said.

Iris said the first thing that came into her mind.

“ You needn’t recognize me if you’d rather not.”

Her voice was bitter ; she held her head high. From pink Mona went crimson. She made a little grab at Iris and caught her by the arm.

“ My dear, of course I want to see you. Let’s go somewhere and have coffee ; somewhere where we can talk.”

She meant somewhere where they might escape recognition. Iris apprehended her meaning perfectly ; she herself proposed and led the way to the nearest Lyons café.

“ Funny, bumping into you like that,” she said. “ I’ve not been this way for ages.”

On the whole she was rather pleased. Mona might be shallow and insincere, but she still felt affection for her. And it was nice to meet and talk again with a woman she knew.



Mona, regarding her quondam friend with critical gaze, decided that she had deteriorated in many ways. She no longer looked smart ; and she had lost much of her beauty as well as her air of distinction. She was not in any sense shabby, that of course was impossible ; but there was an absence of that consciousness of pride in herself which helps a woman to look her best at all times. She felt profoundly sorry for Iris. Also she wished she had not met her. It was awkward and depressing.

" You are not looking too fit," she observed, when they were seated at a little table in a corner of the crowded room, with the coffee cups and a plate of biscuits between them. " Of course I know you have been ill ; but you ought to have got over that by now."

" Don't you think it would have been a chummy sort of thing to do, just to come and see me ? " Iris asked.

" Absolutely. But, my dear, you know what Richard is. He's almost Victorian in his ideas. I think it's stupid ; but, still, what am I to do ? "

" I thought he was quite a good friend of mine," Iris replied, with memories of long days on the river and his preference for her society above the rest, floating upon the disturbed surface of the present.

" I know. That's what makes it so illogical. Perfectly too crude, my dear. Men are so quaint."

" I don't call that quaint, I call it unkind," Iris returned. She looked at Mona with disconcerting directness. " You've no idea how queer it is, that



knowledge of being shunted. You can't imagine what it feels like. Our unexpected encounter just now gave me quite a sick sort of feeling. It sets my heart jumping to see a face I knew before——"

She broke off and stirred her coffee thoughtfully; but resumed her disconnected phrases before Mona had time to frame a suitable response.

"With you, of course, I don't mind so much. We've been chummy since we were kids. We know one another. You know I'm not really vicious in spite of what's happened. And I don't mind talking to you about myself. I wish we could meet more often. I wish you would come and see me sometimes. Just quietly. Tell Richard I won't presume on the friendship. But it would be nice to see you sometimes."

"My dear, quite too lovely," Mona gushed with charming insincerity. "I'll come. I'll ring you up some day. I'll defy Richard." She laughed brightly. "One has to practise diplomacy in married life. That rightly is the foundation of successful marriage. You and Nigel have discovered that."

"You mean going one's own way and not making fusses?" Iris asked, with a faint uplift of her brows. She had an idea that that was exactly what Mona did mean, and she did not like the imputation very well.

"In a sense yes. There are certain things we do it is kinder to suppress. Why disturb anyone with information he wouldn't appreciate?" She laughed again at Iris's serious look. "Deception is positively virtuous on occasions," she added: "so let's have your number, and I'll ring you up later. I'm quite thrilled

to have seen you. But I wish you were looking less like—less like——”

A faded daguerreotype was the simile in her mind, but she substituted for it the more complimentary expression, a ghost-negative of your former self. To her Iris represented merely a neutral toned, badly executed drawing of herself. The glowing beauty of which once she had been not a little jealous was withdrawn, like the brightness of the sun when on a dull day it hides behind disfiguring clouds.

## XXXV

**F**EELING considerably brightened by the chance encounter with Mona, Iris returned to the flat, and trifled with the cold, ill-prepared lunch which was laid on a table beautified with flowers. The huge basket of irises, a present from Renshaw, occupied most of the table's space. On a card which reposed among the blooms was inscribed his birthday greeting.

The discovery of the card occasioned Iris a pang of disappointment ; she had thought at first the flowers were Nigel's gift. Not for a moment had she imagined Mark would remember it was her birthday. It was years ago, before her marriage, that he had been present at a birthday dinner-party, a very dull dinner-party arranged by her father in her honour, at which Mark had been the only young man present. He must have carried the date in his memory ; and his memory must be excellent to serve him so faithfully at this distance of time.

Her thoughts travelled back to those days in her old home. She had found them dull ; yet her life had been much fuller then, and friends had been numerous and kind. She had had everything she wanted, and yet she had been discontented. She was discontented still, but with greater reason. Discontent. She reflected awhile. Perhaps that was what

was wrong with her. Why not make the best of things, get the best out of what offered, show a smiling front to the world? People made too much of their private griefs, their personal disappointments; they hugged these things to them. She resolved to bring a healthier philosophy to bear upon life's problems. She was growing suspicious. She must curb that. Why should she entertain doubts of Nigel because he had forgotten the date? He must have bought the pendant for her; he would surprise her with his gift later.

She spent a lonely afternoon, during which she rested in order to look her best that evening when he came home. He had promised to be early if possible; if he recollected the date she knew he would keep his promise.

Early in the afternoon she was called to the telephone. On answering it, she discovered it was Nigel, ringing her up from the office. He was frightfully sorry, but he had forgotten when he told her he would be home to dinner that he had an engagement for that night. It was a bore, but he didn't think he could get out of it very well. He hoped she didn't mind. Iris felt too damped to reply.

"I'll explain when I come home," he added, before replacing the receiver.

When he came home—home being the flat, where he slept and changed his clothes. It was a sort of bed-and-breakfast apartment for him.

She felt bitterly disappointed, and she was angry. What was the use of making wise resolves as to conduct

when with each fresh effort some malign influence frustrated her always in her purpose? She did not turn away from the telephone immediately; she rang up Renshaw.

"Hello, Mark!"

"Hello! That you, Iris?"

"Yes. Are you irrevocably pledged to-night?" she asked.

His voice answered with flattering promptness:

"There is never anything irrevocable about my private engagements, unless they happen to be with you. Do you want me?"

"I'd like you to take me out to dinner. . . . Oh, anywhere you decide. . . . Yes, that will do. Thanks most terribly. . . . No, don't call for me. I'll be there early."

She turned away from the telephone with a thoughtful expression in her eyes. Was it fair to make use of Mark? It meant so much more to him than it did to her. But a lonely evening in the flat. . . . On her birthday! No; she couldn't bear it. Her last birthday had been spent in prison. She would go mad if she sat at home alone and thought back to those days.

Why had Nigel grown so utterly selfish and indifferent? Selfish he had always been; but he had put her first in his thoughts in the past; of late he never seemed to consider her. Perhaps it was her fault. She had encouraged him to please himself; now she was complaining of her own work.

She tried to excuse him in her thoughts to herself, to feel less upset by his treatment of her; but, though

she became more resigned to this negligence, she did not wish to see him when he returned later to dress. In her present mood she could not listen patiently to his explanations and excuses. She might tell him too plainly what she thought about it. It would be fatal if they started quarrelling.

She went into the tiny kitchen and stopped the preparations for dinner and dismissed the maid early. They were dining out, she explained. Literally it was true, but she knew that she conveyed the impression, that she wished to convey the impression, that they were dining out together. The feeling of a need for subterfuge was hateful.

Iris dressed early. She was resolved she would leave the flat before Nigel returned. She had never before done this. He would be surprised ; probably he would deduce that she was hurt, or angry. She left no message, no note, to inform him where she had gone or with whom. He would conclude she was with Mark, because there was no one else who ever took her out. He sometimes pretended jokingly to jealousy of Mark ; but she realized that he was becoming too indifferent to be jealous of anyone where she was concerned.

With a knowledge of the hours he kept, of his habit of coming in late and dressing hurriedly and rushing off again, she arranged her departure in time to avoid meeting him, and getting into the taxi-cab which the porter called for her, she was driven rapidly beyond the spacious quiet of Hyde Park into the crowded brilliant thoroughfares where the night life of the City

offered its varied attractions. In the past she had loved the lights and the crowds ; they still held attraction for her. Even in her mood of bitter disappointment, of anger, a stir of excitement thrilled her and lent brightness and colour to eye and cheek.

If only she could put life back, if she could start anew with the promise of happiness ahead ! Life might still be a good thing, if it were not for this tormenting doubt which racked and humiliated her. She loved her husband so well that it was torture to her to feel his love being surely withdrawn from her. She wondered dully what she would do if she lost his love—if she found herself supplanted in his affections ? That fear gripped her—that someone was drawing him away from her.

Arrived at the hotel which Renshaw had mentioned, she alighted from the taxi-cab to find him, early though it was, waiting for her. He was on the watch for her arrival ; and he came forward quickly, dismissed the taxi, and escorted her inside.

He had a table engaged, to which he led her ; and he sat down opposite and started to talk in a quiet friendly way which put her quickly at her ease. What he thought of her sudden change of programme did not transpire, but underneath the calm of his manner stirred a profound curiosity as to why she had asked for his escort on a night specially reserved, as she had previously informed him, for her husband. Something must have happened to account for this alteration in her plans. It was obvious that she was excited. A bright spot of colour burned in either cheek, and



her eyes shone with unnatural brilliancy. There was a look of hardness in them when they met his across the table, and smiled in acknowledgment of his good wishes, when he raised his wine-glass and toasted her.

"My birthday. . . . Yes," she said. "How came you to remember?"

"I don't know," he answered. "There are some things one doesn't forget. Some things and some people."

"Well, Nigel has forgotten," she said.

"Oh! Is that it? I wondered. He'll be ready to kick himself later, I expect."

"Perhaps. I suppose I ought not to have told you."

"I don't see why not."

"You are a sort of father confessor to me, aren't you?" She looked at him gratefully, and her eyes lost their hard brightness. "I was feeling hurt when I rang you up."

"That's understandable," he answered. "But a lapse of memory of that nature is more unkind in effect than in principle. I suppose pride restrained you from reminding him?"

"Yes."

"And so I benefit. I don't see why we shouldn't have a jolly evening notwithstanding the fact that I fill the unsatisfying rôle of proxy. I am less particular in regard to the method of attainment than to the thing attained. I'm frightfully happy in having you to myself to-night when I had resigned myself to a lonely evening."

"Your lonely evenings!" she scoffed, and smiled at

him with affection. "What do you do during your lonely hours? I'd like to take a peep at you sometimes in your solitude."

"You wouldn't be much entertained," he said. "I read generally."

"Law?" she asked.

He nodded. Since the time when he had defended her he did not care to discuss his profession with her. It went too close to the heart of things.

"Why don't you marry, Mark?" she asked suddenly.

"If I answered that question truthfully you would affect disbelief," he replied. "It's rather an unkind question to put to a bachelor."

"Particularly when the supply in wives exceeds the demand," she rejoined. "Shall I tell you something which is rather flattering? I never met anyone who was quite nice enough for you."

Renshaw laughed.

"I have," he said; "but she didn't set so high a value on me as you now profess."

"I think you are wedded to your work," she said.

"Work is an anodyne for most complaints," he answered, and guided the talk into less personal channels.

## XXXVI

DURING the entire evening Renshaw devoted himself sedulously to the entertainment of Iris. He wanted her to forget the earlier disappointment. With a view to the more complete distraction of her thoughts he took her to a theatre, where a bright comedy, rather broad but extremely funny, kept her laughing gaily. They gave themselves up to the fun of the thing; they laughed immoderately all in the wrong places, as Iris said. That struck him as odd, that they could laugh in this care-free, wholehearted manner, when all the while his emotions like exposed nerves tortured him, and he knew that she too was tormented almost beyond endurance. He had seen the pain and humiliation behind the hardness of her eyes; he had seen her wince when she admitted that Nigel had forgotten the day. She cared still for this scamp, who was not worthy of her, who in all the months since her release, as during all the months of her detention, had contrived to put the thought of her, of his duty towards her, so completely behind him that he could go on his untroubled way and experience no remorse in the knowledge of his neglect of her.

That matters could not go on as they were indefinitely appeared very certain to Renshaw. For long he had observed her; and he saw that she was becoming

restive. There was in her look, in her mind, a question, a sort of air of suspicion. If doubt once got a firm hold he had a persuasion that she would never rest till she got to the bottom of things. How she would act if she discovered the truth he had no idea. It was impossible to gauge the behaviour of any particular woman to whom the infidelity of her husband became known ; but he had an idea that Iris would not condone such a thing. She would be hurt to the soul. He would have guarded her from the pain of discovery had that been possible ; but with her destiny in the indifferent selfish hands of Nigel Hennelly, disaster appeared inevitable.

With the finish of the play he drove her home and went up in the lift with her to her flat. He took her latchkey from her, and opening the door, followed her inside. She did not invite him in, but she accepted his coming rather as a matter of course. He usually entered with her and switched on the lights. She had an idea that he did not like her to enter the empty flat alone ; nor did she herself care about doing so. She was always nervous when left alone there at night.

“Come into the sitting-room and have a cocktail,” she said. She drew his attention to the basket of flowers. “Your irises, Mark. It was sweet of you to send them. My one birthday present.” She touched the flowers caressingly. “Aren’t they beautiful? You know it’s frightfully extravagant of you. It’s lucky you are so rich. Mix the drinks while I go into the next room and powder my nose.”

Her absence was not of sufficient duration to allow him time to do more than get out the bottles. She came back in agitated haste; and Renshaw, turning abruptly, was surprised to see her standing in the doorway with a white face and a look in her eyes that told him something rather serious had happened. She looked like a woman who has seen a ghost. She had seen a ghost: the ghost of another woman was mirrored in her brain.

"He's not coming back to-night. I found this," she said.

She held out a note to him which he took from her without comment and read. The note, which Nigel had written on finding her absent and left for her in her bedroom, read:

"I am sorry you were not in when I got back, as I wanted to explain why I am obliged to be away this evening, and why in all probability I shall not return to-night. A man I know is in trouble. I am spending the night with him. He needs me, poor chap! I am sure you would wish me to see him through."

"That is a pack of lies," Iris said, when he handed the note back to her.

"It may be," he replied.

"May be! You know it is. You saw him during that hold up at the Circus. His car went across us while we were stationary."

"I had hoped," he said, regarding her steadily, "that you hadn't observed that."

"Because I said nothing! Of course I saw. But if it hadn't been for this," she crumpled the note in her hand, "I should have seen nothing sinister in it. Who was the girl with him?"

"My dear! How should I know?"

"There is one thing about you, Mark, I've always admired; you are generally truthful. Don't start telling me lies, even from a desire to spare my feelings." She faced him squarely with a look of determination and of anger in her eyes. "If you don't wish to tell me, say so; but don't tell me lies."

Renshaw's response was so unexpected that for a time Iris forgot her outraged and wounded feelings in an emotion of swift dismayed surprise which for the moment held her speechless. He stood confronting her with so quiet an air and spoke with such calmness that he might have been making the most ordinary proposal.

"Come away with me," he said.

He made no movement towards her; he showed no surprise at her amazed, protracted, almost stunned silence, but stood quietly observant of her; the same calm, self-reliant, reassuring person she had always known and liked and respected—the same old Mark, and making such a suggestion.

"Well!" she said with a little gasp which fell across the silence with the soft inflection of a note of inquiry. She crushed the ball of paper more tightly in her hand, but otherwise she did not move. He did not move either, nor did he turn his gaze from hers.

"I can look after you better than he does," he said.

That brought Iris's thoughts back to her immediate personal trouble. She gave him a look of agonized appeal and sat down suddenly.

"Mark, old thing, you're a long way from finding a remedy," she said. "That's the last step I should feel likely to take."

"Not if you cared for a man," he said.

"Care!" She looked up at him with tragic eyes. "I've only loved one man in all my life. God help me! I still love him. He'll break my heart probably; but that won't kill my love."

"Do you think he's worth all that?" he asked.

"These things don't go by merit," she responded dully. "I know just how good and how bad he is. I haven't any illusions."

"Ah! well, it was only a proposition," he returned. "And it holds good for always. Your happiness is of greater importance to me than anything else; and I should like to take this opportunity of pointing out to you that in acquiescing in his neglect of you you are not promoting his happiness, or any other good thing. It's time you made a stand."

"This thing has been going on for some time, Mark?" she said.

"I know very little about his private affairs," he replied evasively. "We were never great friends. And I don't think I would inform you," he added, "if I did know anything. In the circumstances it wouldn't come well from me."

He saw that she scarcely listened to him; her mind was intent on the horrible, distressing discovery



that someone had supplanted her in her husband's affections. Who was this girl? She had seen her face quite clearly, a young, pretty, baby-face; rather commonplace, she had decided from the momentary glimpse obtained when the taxi slid past them. Possibly even then the girl was wearing the diamond and opal pendant she had imagined Nigel had bought for her. This explained in a sense how he had come to forget her birthday; she, and everything in connection with her, had ceased to interest him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and brought a hand down sharply upon the arm of the chair with a gesture of angry vehemence. "This is intolerable. Mark, I don't know what to do. I feel as if I should go mad. I can't bear it."

She began to cry.

"I think you'd better go," she sobbed. "I can't help it. I'll make a scene. You'd better not stay."

"Nonsense!" he said. "I'm not afraid of scenes. Let yourself go, if you want to."

He seated himself on the arm of her chair, but he did not venture to touch her; he had the feeling that she might resent it. Also he was afraid to trust himself to act as comforter. Why, he wondered, couldn't she let the man go? He wasn't worth a single tear. He wasn't worth a regret. Old Chaffery hadn't been so far out in his estimate of Hennelly, harsh though his judgment had seemed at the time. He lacked moral stamina. Easy-going, good company, likeable, but without the finer qualities which go to make a

man. We are as we are made. No line of conduct, no line of thought may be universally applied. To one man the dunghill, to another the mountain heights, to the majority the uneven plain midway.

He broke off in his reflections to remonstrate with her.

"Buck up, Iris!" he said. "Aren't you rather accepting defeat? It's infatuation, this; it won't last. Pull yourself together and make a stand."

"It's no use, Mark; I've lost him. I've known that for some time, but I wouldn't believe it before."

"Then let him go; he's not worth holding."

"He's my husband," she said.

He had no answer to that, and for a while there was silence between them. Then Iris said, in flat, hopeless tones:

"I can't help the feeling that largely it's my fault."

"Your fault!" he interjected incredulously.

"I've encouraged him to be selfish. I've thrust it at him always—the duty he owed to himself. I made him see that he must live his own life, that he must leave me behind. It wasn't fair to him."

"Give up shouldering the blame always and push his due burden on to his shoulders," Renshaw said with a touch of impatience. "You want bracing, Iris. Don't trail your flag in the dust. Cut her out. She can't hold a candle to you in any single respect."

"Then you do know her?" Iris said quickly, and looked up at him through her tears.

"I know her as a little ballerina who dances rather

prettily," he replied. "Nigel is her whim for the moment. But her whims don't last."

"Oh!" she exclaimed bitterly, her face contorted with anger. "This is intolerable. I can't bear it."

## XXXVII

**R**ENSHAW left Iris in the early hours of the morning. He had sat on, talking to her, reasoning with her, advising her. And all the while he knew that he was not effecting anything, that he was merely wasting breath : when he was no longer with her she would forget all he had said, if indeed she followed what he said. She would act entirely as her own feelings directed. She was not a woman easily led ; there was too much of her father's nature in her for that. The remedy which he had proposed, the only remedy as he saw things, she had rejected out of hand. He thought her decision mistaken. He would have given up everything for her willingly, would have devoted himself to her happiness, taken her abroad, anywhere ; travelled about. He had an income sufficient for this independent of his profession. He would have sacrificed his profession even for her sake, although he was immensely interested in his work and ambitious to succeed. It was the dominating interest in his life apart from her. He was careful during their long talk not to repeat his proposal to her. This thing was too recent ; the shock of it had numbed her ; later there would be reaction. He would wait.

He advised her on parting from her to go to bed. She would wear herself out ; that wouldn't help matters.

But after he had gone Iris forgot all about that. She sat there until the struggling daylight broke through the curtains and clashed with the electric light, which had burned throughout the night. The new day came in brightly and found her, with tired nerves and aching brow, seated in the big chair in which Renshaw had left her sitting.

She got up wearily and extinguished the lights and went into her bedroom. It would not do to let the maid come in and discover her sitting there.

Slowly she took off her dress and turned and surveyed her white face in the glass. What a wreck she looked. She recalled Mark's words: "Cut her out. She can't hold a candle to you in any single respect." She laughed suddenly, a queer strangled laugh, and stared at her pinched tragic features, her pallid lips. She felt as though she were going mad. She had lost her husband's love. What did it matter if she lost her beauty also? Without his affection beauty, life itself, counted as nothing to her. He was everything to her, all she had; and now she had lost him. . . .

How was she going to get through the long day until she saw him? And when they met, what was she to say? The position seemed hopeless.

She bathed her face and repaired the ravages made by grief and the overnight vigil with the aid of cosmetics. She used artificial colour on her cheeks and lips. Until her recent illness such aids to the complexion had been superfluous; now her white face without some such artifice would have attracted attention. She was terribly afraid of the servant's

quick eyes, and anxious to conceal all sign of distress from her. It would have been the final injury to know that she had the maid's pity. The only consolation in sorrow weighted with humiliation is the knowledge that it is not shared by others.

Mark was excepted. He was different from any other friend she had ever possessed. True as steel and secretive as the grave. But then he loved her. That was something she understood. It was quite simple to put self last where one loved. Mark loved her as she loved Nigel, selflessly, absolutely. Odd, she reflected, how things happened. Love should be reciprocal. She knew that in the early days of their marriage Nigel had loved her ; but his devotion had never been absolutely unselfish. It was not in his nature to give himself up entirely to anything. But he had cared. It seemed to her incredible that two years ago they were happy together ; that within the interval of those fateful two years he should have tired of her. It was the disgrace of her imprisonment which had effected the change in him, she believed. The disgrace, and their eleven months' separation. She too had changed in certain respects. She had lost much of her vitality ; her old spirit was dead. She had been still a girl when she went to prison ; she came out a woman, discouraged, saddened, afraid to face life ; and older, infinitely older, though not in years, than he was. He had been growing away from her steadily ever since. He was out of sympathy with her, out of touch. And someone had come between them. A chit of a girl. A dancer, who appeared at

music-halls and danced herself daringly into the affections of old men and callow youth. For the time, Nigel, the poorest of her admirers, was the recipient of her favour. He had held her affection for a longer period than most. He was infatuated ; and, in her more calculating way, she too was held by the romance of their attachment. She was reluctant to let him go. In the gratification of a conquest which gained him the envy of others, he was keener on keeping her affection than otherwise [might have been the case.

But he had hoped to keep the knowledge of this affair from his wife. He had no wish to hurt her unnecessarily. There was no reason why she should know. She permitted him so much licence that it seemed to him it ought to be perfectly simple to keep the thing from her. He did not allow for the accident of her discovering the pendant, and the curiosity this discovery provoked. It is the little unforeseen lapse which betrays most secrets.

When he returned that afternoon, and came into the sitting-room where his wife was, he discovered her seated beside the tea-table doing unnecessary things with an air of worried preoccupation. In the agitation of the moment she poured the boiling water into the teapot forgetful of the tea, and discovering her mistake, busied herself with emptying the water from the pot into the china basin. A sickening feeling of nervousness came over her when she heard his key turn in the lock. She did not know what to say to him. She did not turn as he entered.



He came in and bent over her with the intention of kissing her.

"Sorry to have left you alone last night," he said. "I hope you didn't mind much?"

She stooped to switch off the electric current and avoided his caress.

"Let me do that," he said, and became helpful, and alert to the significance of her action in thus avoiding his kiss. The atmosphere was oppressive. He thought she was angry at his being away all night; he had then no intimation of her knowledge.

"We'll go out together to-night instead," he said.

She met his eyes and the look in hers silenced him.

"To-night isn't the same," she answered. "It was my birthday yesterday."

"Oh, I say, Iris, I never remembered! How rotten of me. You know what a head I have for dates. But I can't forgive myself for forgetting your birthday. Why didn't you remind me?"

"Would it have made any difference?" she asked.

He made allowance for her disappointment. She was angry; but she would get over that; she never sulked. He laid a hand on her shoulder, standing beside her chair.

"Darling, you don't need to ask that."

"Where were you last night?" she demanded.

"I told you." His hand slid from her shoulder; he turned away.

"You said someone needed you. Who was the man?"

"No one you know."

He mentioned a name she had not heard before ; it was probably fictitious, she decided.

"What was the trouble ?" she inquired.

"Oh ! several things. Money. A girl. Poor chap, he's knocked over badly."

"Were you with him all the time ?"

Something in her voice arrested him. He stood scrutinizing her attentively. There was more than anger to account for her manner ; and indeed anger was noticeable rather for its absence ; she appeared curiously quiet and self-controlled.

"A good part of the time," he returned evasively.

"And what did you do with the other part—the bad part ?" she said, a note of ironic inflexibility hardening her voice.

He stared at her. What was she driving at ? What did she know or suspect ?

"Really, this is something of a curtain lecture," he said. He stooped for his cup, which she had filled with mechanical precision born of familiarity with the task. "What's wrong, Iris ? It isn't like you to show resentment at my being away from you for a few hours."

"No," she said. "I've not shown resentment enough. I think you fancy I don't care where you are or what you do. You think I don't feel your neglect. Well, I do."

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I have been very selfish." He put down his teacup and stood awkwardly regarding her with unmistakable curiosity.

"I didn't think. Forgive me."

Her lip quivered. It was the old Nigel speaking in the old winning way. She found it difficult to resist him. Then across her memory flashed a picture of a girl's face, fair and smiling, and her heart hardened anew. She would not be cheated by him any more. She would get to the root of this matter, sift things, have things on a plain footing. She was not going to share his love ; it was all or nothing. She intended to have that clear.

She dispensed with the farce of taking tea and stood up also and confronted him. Her glance fell to the invoice for the pendant, which she had placed conspicuously on the mantelpiece for him to discover. In the surprise of her challenge he had not discovered it, though it was spread open to view. She handed it to him.

" You dropped this at breakfast yesterday," she said.

He looked at it. She fancied he changed colour, but he carried the matter off well.

" Yes. That's been sent in mistake," he said. " I haven't been ordering any pendants." He put the invoice in his pocket. " I must call in and see about it."

She looked at him steadily, and for a moment there was a tense stillness in the room.

" Unfortunately for your explanation," she said, " I had that opal and diamond pendant in my hands yesterday."

He was too taken aback to lie further. He simply stood there and reddened under her gaze and said nothing.

### XXXVIII

HUSBAND and wife faced one another from opposite ends of the hearthrug. Nigel looked guiltily embarrassed; he avoided the accusing scrutiny of his wife's eyes; their look of distress, of bitter anger, made him uncomfortable. He was at a loss to understand how she came by her knowledge. What exactly, he wondered, did she know? Or did she merely suspect something? Because of that rotten trinket. How on earth had she found out about that? This revelation had sprung upon him so suddenly that it found him unprepared. He felt unequal to cope with the situation. He became unreasonably and shamelessly angry.

"I never supposed you would do such a low thing as go through my pockets," he said.

"And you don't suppose that now," she returned icily. "You know I wouldn't. The thing fell out when I was brushing your coat. I believed you had bought it for me. I might still be in doubt on that point if you hadn't lied about it."

"Damn!" he said, and crumpled the invoice in his hand and flung it on the floor. "I suppose you are jealous?" he said.

"Of a girl who dances and is as common as dirt! No. I am only disgusted."

He brought his head round with a jerk while she was speaking ; when she ceased, he asked abruptly :

“ Who told you that ? Mark, no doubt ! Cad ! ”

“ I saw you with her,” she returned—“ last night, when you were, supposedly, ministering to a distressed friend.” Swift anger overcame her calm, her voice shook. “ How dare you lie to me ? How dare you go to this girl, spend the night with her, and then come back to me ? Oh ! ” She thrust forward a hand as though she warded off something repulsive. “ It is intolerable ! ”

“ I’m sorry,” he said more quietly. “ I see how it must strike you. But, indeed, I never saw it like that until this moment. I never thought you would know.”

“ I don’t see that that excuses anything,” she said.

“ Perhaps not. But at least it explains my gross carelessness. I never thought you would be hurt by this knowledge. I meant to keep it from you. I’m not such a brute as to hurt you deliberately.”

“ But why begin this thing ? Do you love this girl ? ”

“ In a way, yes.”

“ Then you don’t love me any longer ? ”

She looked him steadily in the eyes when she put this question, and for a space he returned her look ; then his gaze wavered, fell.

“ I don’t know quite how to explain. You wouldn’t understand,” he said.

“ Whether I understand or not, I think an explanation is due to me,” she said.

Something in the quiet inflexibility of her voice, as also in the steady penetration of her gaze, suggested to him the wisdom of full confession. She knew so much; it couldn't make matters worse if she knew the whole; to keep things back from her would be only to excite her further suspicion.

"It's not easy to explain," he said. "These things don't admit of explanation; they're elemental. Women can't usually grasp the attraction a man feels sometimes for some woman who appeals to him physically."

"Oh!"

"Yes," he said, when she uttered that sharp exclamation of disgust; "I know. That's what I am attempting to convey, your instinctive revulsion from what to me seems perfectly natural if altogether regrettable. The last thing in this world I wanted to do was to care for a girl of this type. I wouldn't make her my wife, if that were possible—but she has a hold on me all right."

"I can't understand you," Iris said tonelessly. "If you didn't tell me yourself I couldn't believe this of you. Didn't you feel—when the thing started—that you owed me some duty?"

"I don't know what I felt. I drifted into this when you were away. I was lonely, and she fitted in somehow. I never meant at the beginning it should go so far. I didn't mean to go on. But she got a grip on me. That's all there is to it, Iris. Now you know the worst."

She clutched at the mantelpiece with one hand and

remained quite still, like a woman dazed from some blow which has numbed her senses, staring fixedly at the knuckles of her hand, showing white with the strained force of her grasp. He told this story of his infidelity with the detachment of a man speaking of the affairs of someone else. She could detect no shame, no remorse, and very little sympathy in his voice. He did not care. She had ceased to be an object for his consideration even. Something hard and cold as steel seemed to close about her and crush all the gentleness out of her. Her white face, like a marble mask, betrayed no sign of any emotion, only a cold austerity, a stern aloofness, which disguised the anguish of her wounded heart. In that moment of bitter disillusionment she despised him utterly. She saw him as he was, denuded of the glamour in which love had clothed him, with the deformities of his nature stark to the gaze. He was no worse than other men: that was what he had sought to convey. She ought to be prepared to put up with this sort of thing. But she wasn't so prepared; she would make that clear at least.

"This has got to end," she said.

"You mean——" He turned to her with a sharp, surprised movement, and met the cold resentment of her eyes and paused. "These things always do end some time," he added awkwardly after the pause.

"It must end now," she said with quiet emphasis. "You must choose between us. I am not prepared to share you with anyone."

"Don't be absurd," he said.

Her calm deserted her; she flared up at that.



"No words of mine can tell you what I think of you," she said. "And indeed perhaps it's better that I shouldn't attempt to tell you. I'm through with you. You have treated me abominably. Your neglect I was prepared to bear, though it was breaking my heart ; but unfaithfulness. . . ."

She dropped her face on her arm suddenly and began to sob.

"You must choose between us. . . . I can't stand this. If you won't give her up, you can't come back to me."

"I wish to God I hadn't come back now !" he flung out at her, and went out of the room and into his bedroom.

She heard him later go out again. The door banged behind him. She had not the remotest idea whether he would come back or if he had gone for ever. In her present mood she did not mind. She felt that his absence would be a relief ; she felt that she hated him even. Looking back on their lives together, it became a matter for wonderment that she could ever have loved him with the blind worship she once had given him. He had never made any adequate return. His love had always been a little careless. She would not have complained had he remained faithful to her. But he had transferred his affections ; he did not love her any longer. It seemed to her that he did not even respect her.

She found herself wondering whether if the hundred thousand pounds mentioned in her father's will had been hers that would have made a difference ? Nigel

had an immense respect for money. Would things have been otherwise had she been rich? Was it just money he cared for? Had he married her, as her father had asserted was the case, because he believed one day she would be wealthy, and now felt himself cheated because she brought no money with her? . . .

So her thoughts ran on, following his departure, while she sat, dry-eyed now and bitter, considering him, the things he had said, his whole mental attitude in regard to their relations. The situation was intolerable. She could find no other word which exactly fitted it. What was she to do? She could not go on living with him as things were. Separation presented itself as a possible solution.

Thinking of separation brought home to her the appalling loneliness of her condition. What would she do, alone always? How could she live, and where? A sense of acute despondency overwhelmed her. This was the final drop in the bitter cup presented to her lips. Life, which might have been a good and happy thing, was just hopeless. It had opened for her with such promise; and she had ruined its promise till it threatened to close down in a drab greyness. Separation from her would be no punishment for him; she could not retaliate on him in any way because he did not care. She could only further punish and distress herself. She had no life apart from him, could conceive of no life for herself in which he did not share.

And she believed that later his old power over her would reassert itself. Anger, outraged pride, steeled

her against him for the time ; but her love was too deeply rooted for her to dig it out of her heart and cast it finally aside.

It was too deeply rooted to admit of her acceptance of second place in his affections. The thought maddened her. And the bitterest reflection of all was that while she was grieving her heart out in prison, where by right he also should have been, where now she almost wished he had been, he was amusing himself in this fashion in complete disregard for her suffering.

Oh ! it was unendurable, unforgivable. The callous brutality of the thing was past belief. He had taken all she had given, given so freely ; her warm fresh love, her heart ; he had accepted these gifts, and now, not so much threw them aside, as put them down and forgot them and turned to new interests. And he seemed to think that she ought not to mind ; that she ought to be satisfied to leave him to go his own way and not ask questions. She had to accept this situation or separate from him.

The sordid alternative of divorce stared her bleakly in the face. Divorce. . . . She wondered dully whether children would have made a difference ? Was that the remedy which they had missed—the natural safeguard ?

## XXXIX

**H**ENNELLY left the flat in a state of immense exasperation, in which mood it seemed to him that for his wife to be in possession of this information was intrusive, as it was indelicate of her to refer to it. If she were wise she would ignore the whole incident, and eventually it would end of itself as these things always did. For the present it held him irresistibly; but an intimation of the unstable quality of his beloved's affections obtruded itself on occasions, and warned him of the insecurity of his tenure. He was enraged that the affair should have leaked out in this manner. It was highly inconvenient. Money, always the first consideration with him, and always an inadequate commodity, did not admit of his running a separate establishment. He did not see how he was going to arrange a separate income for his wife. Curse old Chaffery! Curse his memory! Why hadn't he left Iris something? Why hadn't he made a decent will?

Thinking of old Chaffery and his will jerked into his memory the offensive clause relating to his possible demise. If he were to die, if for instance he met with an accident, was knocked down by a motor-car, killed, then Iris would inherit one hundred thousand pounds. Revolting condition! It was temptation to a man

to commit suicide—if he wanted his wife to have a hundred thousand pounds and was sufficiently self-effacing to accommodate her.

He did not return home that night. He did not return home before the third day following his abrupt and angry departure. During those three days his thoughts were engaged very fully with Iris and old Chaffery's will and that disgusting clause in the will.

He reflected on these matters continually. Underlying his annoyance and sense of high independence, a sort of shame for his behaviour to his wife strove with an insistent desire to vindicate his perfect right to behave in just such a way, and to travel his own road without interference from her. He had stuck to her; that on the face of things was highly creditable. He felt that he had behaved very decently on the whole—up to the present. He had never reproached her for letting him down. And she had let him down—badly. That wretched case had done him incalculable harm.

Across these reflections trailed inconsecutively the thought that his wife had suffered unduly; that it was rather despicable of him to fail her like this. He worked himself up on the third day to a pitch of sympathy with her which drove him to the contemplation of what life might hold for her without him and with the very comfortable fortune that would be hers in the event of his death. After all, it was really he who was a drag on her.

He was dodging the traffic in Victoria Street when this idea presented itself. There had been a hold-up,

and the traffic was moving forward again like something inexorably progressive shaking itself free of restraint. He had only to step off the pavement, make a hurried attempt to cross, and he would be run down, smashed like an egg by this juggernaut of modern progression. He watched the 'buses, the motor-cars, and a large dray drawn by shire horses, an endless stream, viewed as through a kaleidoscope, moving ceaselessly forward with monotonous regularity and strangely little noise. And while he looked the thought that he had only to step off the pavement to give Iris one hundred thousand pounds and freedom took a firmer grip of his imagination till, as it seemed wholly without his volition, he actually did step off the pavement, and was roundly sworn at by a man the wing of whose car just touched him before, realizing what he was doing, he sprang back to safety. He leaned against an iron standard, shaken with the narrowness of his escape. His face was white.

“ My God ! ” he muttered. “ I might have been run over.”

Shocked and impressed with the reality of the now averted danger, he resumed his way in subdued mood. It would have been beastly to be smashed in a street accident.

That evening, contrary to his original purpose, he returned to the flat. He had intended to remain away long enough to allow Iris time to realize what it would be like if he were to remain away altogether ; but some impulse, stronger than this amiable determination, moved him to return and face her decision. Probably



by now she would have resolved what she meant to do. He felt curious on this point, although he told himself he did not care particularly what her decision might be. Behind this defiant attitude lurked a hope, a feeble anæmic kind of hope, that he would surprise her in more amicable mood.

He did not want to part irrevocably. In the remote places of his inner consciousness, firmly housed there despite his recent efforts to eject them, pleasant memories of his wife lingered and fought their silent battle on her account. Memories of the days before their marriage when he had fallen in love with her, with her beauty and charm and brightness, obtruded themselves insistently. Certainly he had loved her then ; any man would have loved her ; she was so beautiful, such a sport. Why couldn't he feel like that about her any longer ? He had no answer to that. Simply he did not feel like that. It was not only the new interest which had come between them, it was the weakening of a strand here and there, the lessening of her importance, that familiarity which leads, if not to contempt, at least to a decreased regard ; so many things combined to bring about this state of affairs that it was impossible to point to any single instance as responsible for the steady diminution of his love.

If life had given them a fair chance, he told himself, with the thought of Chaffery's millions in his mind as the basis of this chance, it was pretty certain that his interest in Iris would not have slackened in this deplorable manner. Old Chaffery had been correct in his



summing up of his daughter : she was expensive ; she needed an expensive setting. He repudiated fiercely the suggestion, evolving from these reflections, that he had had mercenary motives in marrying her. That was not true. He had fallen in love with her quite disinterestedly and sincerely. But he had admired her as a brilliant jewel in a brilliant setting ; since the gem was removed from its setting, while its value remained unimpaired, its attractive qualities suffered depreciation.

So he reasoned on his way back to his wife ; till finally he ceased to speculate on the matter, and became simply submissive to the march of events. It was all a muddle. He saw no way out of the confusion, and was satisfied to leave it in her hands.

On entering the flat he found her out. This was unexpected and acted as a sort of check. He hardly knew why her absence at the moment he saw fit to return should upset him, since she was not advised of his purpose, but it did act as an irritant. Why at this critical juncture in their lives could she not have stayed at home ?

His imagination, which had been busying itself with pictures of their reconciliation, sheered away from this agreeable promise and began working on the lines of a possible open rupture. Something must happen. He couldn't go on being irritated like this.

She came in only a few minutes in advance of their dinner hour ; and, having seen his hat in the passage, was prepared to some extent for the meeting. She went straight into the sitting-room without waiting

to take off her outdoor things. She was nervous and manifestly worried, and, which struck him more particularly, she did not appear in the least pleased to see him. She came into the room and shut the door behind her, and he stood up and went forward a few paces to meet her and then stopped.

"I saw your hat, so knew you were back."

She looked white and tired, and her face showed signs of great fatigue and anxiety. These evidences of her distress oddly did not move him; he would have felt more responsive had she looked her best.

"I wanted to have a talk with you," he said; "that's why I came."

"Yes." She scrutinized him earnestly. Then abruptly she crossed to the sofa and sat down and began to take off her hat. "You have been a long time making up your mind about that."

He wondered how he had ever thought a reconciliation possible. Since she took this attitude he was less disposed to pity her and blame himself.

"It was not a matter which admitted of haste," he returned frigidly. "It is the whole of our future lives we have to consider."

"I know. But I thought you had considered yours, and mine seems of little concern to you."

While she spoke she patted the dark waves of hair into place. The doing of this was purely mechanical and as natural as the pulling off her hat; she gave no thought to either action at the moment; her hands moved automatically and were not governed by her mind, which was preoccupied with the new trouble

which had rushed upon her with the suddenness of flood waters swamping everything before their unrestrained advance. But Nigel felt a further sense of irritation as he observed her. Why must she be so trivial in a moment of such grave importance?

"Oh, if you are going to take that tone!" he said and moved away to the window and stood looking out with his back to her.

She pressed a hand to her brow as though it ached and answered nothing. And at that moment the gong sounded. She had forgotten all about dinner. She did not want any. Then she glanced at his broad back blocking the window. He did not move, but he heard her slow movement as she turned to him.

"I suppose we had better go in?" she said.

## XL

**D**URING the progress of dinner, which they took almost in silence, no reference was made to the subject uppermost in their thoughts. The resumption of the conversation was postponed until the meal was ended and they went back again to the sitting-room and the stresses of their talk which the booming of the gong had interrupted. But the interval, and the enforced keeping up of appearances during the service of the table, made it still more difficult to open up the subject of his moral lapse and her very natural resentment.

A profound and significant silence fell between them when, with the coffee on a little table beside Iris's chair, disregarded in the strain of this emotional crisis, they found themselves finally alone together.

Nigel lighted himself a cigarette and puffed furiously, till a smoke-cloud like the beginning of a London fog hung between him and his wife. Through this hazy curtain his wife's dark head and chiselled profile showed blurred and uncertain of outline. She kept her face averted, so that he could not see, and had no idea, that there were tears in her eyes.

One penitent word from him, one sign of affection, and he would have won her over and might have ended their estrangement finally. But instead of

feeling penitent he was feeling aggrieved. He had anticipated that she would meet him, not only half-way, but considerably in advance of that neutral zone. Her reception of him had chilled him. And the dinner had been poor. That was a further aggravation. She had not expected him, and had not bothered for herself; with the result that the meal had been insufficient and unappetizing. He regretted that he had not waited and dined out.

The silence became so protracted that he felt constrained to break it.

"Well," he said at last, "have you made up your mind what you are going to do?"

"No," she answered, and winked away the tears lest he should discover that she was crying.

There was a further silence. Speech when it is of the utmost importance becomes increasingly difficult.

"What do you want?—a divorce?" he asked presently.

She winced at that, but she did not look up. She remained very still, with her hands locked together in her lap, staring at the carpet.

"Not unless you wish it," she said.

"A separation then?" he suggested. "I'll see a lawyer about it if you like."

A hot shamed colour stained her face, but for which sign of distress she maintained her dignified calm. She turned her head slightly and looked him directly in the eyes.

"I think we don't need to air our domestic differences

in public," she said. "We can separate by mutual agreement, without legal proceedings."

He considered that awhile. Eventually he harked back to the subject of divorce.

"If you were free you might marry Renshaw," he suggested.

"That is about the vilest thing you could say," she flashed out with angry scorn. "If you want a divorce I will oblige you; for myself I do not wish it."

"I don't," he replied. "I think it's rot, the fuss you are making. It's going to make everything dashed awkward. And tight. I don't know where the money is coming from to provide you with a separate income."

"I daresay you don't," she retorted, "with your extravagant habits. If you think I am going to live with you as things are you are greatly mistaken. I have borne with your neglect. For a long while I have seen ourselves drifting apart. But this I did not foresee. And I won't have it. I won't live with you under these humiliating conditions. Either you give up this girl, or you give up me. There is no other alternative."

They were back again at the point from whence they started. He flushed angrily, staring at her with resentment where she sat, dignified and unrelenting, delivering her ultimatum with a manner irritatingly reminiscent of Mr. Chaffery. He threw the end of his cigarette in a flower-bowl and thrust his hands in his pockets.

"I thought we had settled that," was all he said.

"I hoped that during the interval since our talk

you had thought better of your folly," she returned. "When on my return this evening I saw your hat hanging up, I believed you had come back prepared to make concessions. Otherwise I don't see why you have come."

Her attitude was so resonable that it left him with little to urge in his own defence. Why had he come back? Since he was not prepared to make concessions, it was obvious that he had hoped, if not expected, that she would make the concessions, that she would be only too glad to take him back on any terms. And clearly that was not her attitude. He was indefensibly in the wrong; and she allowed him to see that she recognized this. She would have him back only on her terms; and he did not feel inclined to submit to those. He was not prepared to relinquish anything. At last they came to hard facts, and discussed in detail the conditions on which they would separate and lead independent lives.

"You understand, I hope," he said, exasperated, "that this is final? There'll be no going back once the step is taken."

"I shan't want to go back," she answered in a voice hoarse with pain. "Do you suppose I could endure all over again what I have suffered of late? It won't be happiness for me, living apart, but also it won't be torment. I shall—get used to the loneliness—after a while."

It was late before they finished their talk, too late for him to go out again. He went into his room and packed his things in preparation for departure in the



morning. And Iris, far too restless to sleep had his noisy preparations admitted of her sleeping, wandered between the sitting-room and her bedroom, and even hovered on the threshold of his dressing-room at times and looked on miserably while he packed.

It seemed impossible that this should be the finish of their romance, the end of all their love, their life, together. She could not feel that he was going out of her life, that he would not return ever. It was incredible. Behind her burning sense of indignation, of anger, behind her dry-eyed misery, her love for the husband of her happier days held tenaciously and did battle with her pride.

They breakfasted together next morning, and conversed in short fragmentary sentences. Mutual recrimination held no part in that final talk ; they were through with all that ; they had come to a stage of dull acquiescence in events which each realized as beyond their control.

At the last Iris was perfectly calm. Although dreading the parting she had no wish to keep him. This Nigel was a stranger to her ; he was not the Nigel she had married. She loved that Nigel still ; her heart was a-hunger for him ; but this callous, selfish, morally lax Nigel was altogether strange. She could not get at him to understand his motives. It seemed to her that he was governed not by his intelligence but by his appetites. That was a stage of degeneration to which she had not thought it possible for him to descend. He had not been like that at the time of their marriage ; she could never have fallen in love

with a man of that type. He had degenerated since. She wondered whether this responsibility also could be laid to her account? Whether it might be the direct result of her dishonesty, of those shameful months of separation? Surely she was punished enough to satisfy the sternest sense of justice? And it was not just; it was unjust that this aggregate distress should be meted out to her.

With the finish of breakfast he went to the dressing-room to fetch his things. Iris stood up and listened with a numb pain at her heart to the sounds of his departure. The appearance of the porter to carry his suitcases to the lift, the sound of her husband's voice issuing directions, the unusual energy of the maid, who busied herself unnecessarily with the baggage, all these things, trivial and commonplace as at any other time they would have seemed, each struck a new chill to her heart, added to that numb pain which became as a dull weight dragging her down.

The room door stood open, and she viewed these preparations from within. That the maid would think it strange that she did not go out to see him off did occur to her; but not even in deference to appearances could she bring herself to act this insincere part.

Finally he came to her. He shut the door on their last interview together, at which the absence of all tenderness would have been the only thing likely to attract attention; so far as emotion went all London might have looked on at their parting and remained unimpressed.

"Well, good-bye," he said. "All this is very rotten

for you. But it's your decision. Take care of yourself."

"Good-bye," was all she said.

He turned and went out again and shut the door upon her, upon every hope of a better understanding. Iris sat down at the table, too dazed even to suffer acutely. It was as though the path were cut from under her feet, arresting her further progress, leaving her in a state of frightened bewilderment, in which the aching sense of loss enveloped and stultified every other sensation.

## XLI

THEY were difficult days, those which followed, for Iris. The days stretched into weeks, the weeks into months, bringing no word from her husband, never a sign from, or sight of, him. Into her life now, a dominating figure, refusing to be kept outside, stepped Mark Renshaw.

For awhile she sustained the fiction that Nigel's absence was temporary ; that they had had a quarrel, that he was sulking. But little by little, through an incautious word here and there, an incautious look or sign of grieving, while the days went by without his reappearance, the truth unfolded and revealed the actuality of the separation. Renshaw, when he became cognizant of the facts, was most persistent in urging her to divorce her husband. He wished her to marry him. As before he had asked her to go away with him, so now he urged on her with still greater insistence the importance of securing her release.

Marriage with him provided a simple and reasonable way out of her many difficulties, it seemed to him. The protection of his name alone would help in covering up the past. He was prepared even to give up his profession and take her out of England altogether.

But these very arguments which he used in support of his plea defeated their purpose. It was the past

with its hampering possibilities which divided them like a sea.

Into the picture also, agog with curiosity and sympathy and intense indignation, came Mona ; at first more in curiosity than sympathy ; but later the fascination which Iris's personality had exerted over her previously reasserted itself, and the former friendship was more or less resumed.

Hennelly's conduct in deserting his wife, the flagrant immorality of his present mode of living, did him far more harm than the notoriety occasioned by the trial and his wife's imprisonment. Former friends dropped away, repudiated the acquaintance, cut him dead. From being a popular figure he found himself shunned, till he was forced more and more into the company of people with whom at one time he would not have associated.

And his finances occasioned him increasing worry. At first he allowed his wife half his income, but finding the other half wholly inadequate to his needs, he cut her allowance down to a third, with the result that Iris, equally with himself, found herself embarrassed with accumulating debts.

Mysteriously these debts when they became pressing were settled in a manner she could not account for. For a time her suspicion fell on Mark ; but, when she taxed Renshaw with responsibility in this matter, his denial convinced her that she must seek elsewhere for the source of this surprising and undesired charity. It troubled her to think that someone whose identity was unknown to her was paying out money on her

account. The idea was repugnant. And it was very puzzling. She could think of no one who would be likely to act towards her with this munificent benevolence. In the past she had had many admirers, many lovers, but the majority of these had been the reverse of wealthy. On looking back with a view to sifting her acquaintances on the possible chance of discovering the identity of her benefactor, she was surprised to discover that her lovers had been only more remarkable for their poverty than for their passionate ardour. It was astonishing how frequently she had inspired passion in the breasts of impecunious young men. With her marriage their worshipful adoration had waned ; and the disgrace of her imprisonment had alienated her friends with only a few exceptions.

The exceptions began to rally round her now in her hour of need. Anstruther forgot in his sympathy with her the cautious disapproval which had so exercised him in the past as to make avoidance of the Hennellys, even all mention of them, imperative. To him they had been people under a cloud, people overshadowed by scandal, people one ought to avoid ; and he had avoided them sedulously. Now, first ignoring the fact that his wife had renewed the friendship with Iris, he arrived at the stage where he encouraged her in this, and even proposed inviting Iris to the house.

“ I don't care a damn for public opinion,” he asserted. “ And I believe if she hadn't been cold-shouldered by everyone her skunk of a husband would never have dared to treat her as he has done.”

Since his attitude was so reasonable Mona refrained from reminding him that he had been one of those to hold most determinedly aloof. She recognized that his appreciation of the hardness of Iris's lot was due largely to the fact of Nigel being out of the picture. With his whole-hearted sanction she took Iris with the coming of the warm weather for a quiet month into Hampshire; an act of self-sacrifice which surely atoned for lack of kindness in the past. A quiet month in the country meant for Mona a dull month. In previous days it would have bored Iris equally; but a month of rest and pleasant companionship amid the charming surroundings of Greenway Manor proved a delight now.

Each week-end there arrived at Greenway one or two guests; just to sustain the illusion Mona said that they were living in the world. Unfailingly Mark Renshaw was among these guests. Whether he came by invitation, or simply because he knew she was there, remained uncertain; but his appearance there was altogether more disturbing to Iris than his visits at the flat had been, and of late these had been very embarrassing. He came to Greenway with the support and approval of her hosts, and he came obviously to see her. Anstruther, as well as his wife, was of the opinion that the best thing she could do, indeed the only thing there remained for her to do whereby she might straighten the muddle she had made of her life, was to divorce Nigel and remarry at the earliest opportunity. Mona made it her business to draw Iris's attention to the expediency of this move. It



would open the door for a fresh start. She would be more than foolish if she refused to avail herself of the remedy which fate put in her hands. She found Iris strangely unresponsive.

"Really you ought to have married Mark in the first instance," she said. "He would have made you a better husband than Nigel. And he always worshipped you. You can't get worshipful men often; they are not plentiful, except it's worshipping themselves. Nigel is too good looking; handsome men are so vain."

"One doesn't weigh all these considerations in the balance when one falls in love," Iris replied.

"One doesn't weigh any consideration in the balance at those times. But you've got past that stage."

"Have I?"

"Well, haven't you? If Richard left me for some light-o'-love I'd put my heel on his memory even. And I'd probably throw vitriol over her. To forgive your enemies may be a Christian principle, but to condone unfaithfulness is simply to encourage immorality. Besides, it's undignified. You like Mark, don't you?"

"Altogether too well to tie the millstone of my existence about his neck."

Mona surveyed her friend with an odd and penetrating scrutiny, emitted a quiet, amused laugh, and proceeded to change the subject. Mark's cause was as good as won, she decided. But divorce involved lengthy proceedings. She could not understand why Iris delayed in setting about obtaining her freedom.

There would be no opposition and no difficulty ; but there would be six clear months to wait before the decree could be made absolute. And yet she could let the months go by in careless disregard for the flight of time. It was ridiculous. There appeared to be no reasonable grounds for it ; unless she hoped that Nigel would return to her. That idea suggested itself as possible. Mona herself had still a warm corner in her affections for Nigel ; she could understand that his wife, notwithstanding what had happened, might still care for him.

To Renshaw also this thought presented itself ; it seemed to offer the only explanation of her persistent refusal to obtain her divorce and marry him. He put the question to her directly one day, during a week-end spent at Greenway, where everyone seemed to conspire to leave him and Iris together, indeed to isolate them in a manner too determined for Iris to resist. She accepted his companionship perforce and went on the river with him with a foreknowledge of what he meant to say to her when he got her alone in the boat.

He urged his suit whenever they were together. If he had been backward and reticent in former years, that reproach could not be entered against him now. He not only wanted her very earnestly, but he believed that it would prove the best and happiest thing for her. And so he begged her anew each time they met to cut herself free from the old life and marry him.

That day he put the same question to her. He paddled the little boat in close against the bank, got

it entangled among the reeds and the trailing branches of some overhanging trees, and came to where she sat among the cushions and sat close to her.

"Now tell me why you won't marry me?" he said. "Is it—forgive me—but are you hoping that Nigel will come back?"

"No." She averted her face and looked with grave preoccupation into the distance where the sheen of the river lost itself in the green reflections from the banks. "I never think of that. I don't know what I'd do if he did come back. I don't know whether I would take him back. . . . I—don't—know."

Renshaw hardened himself to the business.

"Then I think you ought to explain exactly why you turn me down when I've shown you pretty plainly that I want you more than anything in the world. You must have a reason."

"It isn't easy to explain," she said, and paused, distressed. He bothered her with his quiet insistence.

"Well, have a try at it," he urged, and sat forward with his arms resting on his knees and looked at her, inquiringly. "I'm a reasonable human being, I hope. If you convince me you have a case I'll retire from the field."

"You are a difficult person to convince against your will," she said.

## XLII

**R**ENSHAW was not to be put off. Persistence, going for a thing and sticking to his purpose, was a dominating characteristic of his always. He sat and waited and watched her with an air of undefeatable perseverance and determination, and a suggestion of inexhaustible supplies of patience and time on his hands. He knew he bothered her, but he was relentless. It was for her good as well as his, he reflected. He had endeavoured to make her see that, but she was somewhat obtuse. For the life of him he could not understand why she held out.

"I love you, Iris. You haven't any doubt of that, I'm sure," he said.

"No, I'm not doubting that, Mark. But love isn't everything."

"It's a mighty big part of everything," he said.

"There's the individual life," she added, a little vaguely, as one who, having an idea in mind, finds expression of it difficult.

"That is the individual life," he rejoined. "It's life itself."

"I know. In a sense, of course, that's true. But life resembles rather the human body with love as its heart."

"But the heart is necessary to the body's very

existence," he urged. "You can't cut it out without destroying the whole. I love you more than anything in life. I want you more than I want anything. Isn't that going to count?"

"It counts for a great deal with me. But don't you understand that for me that's all finished? I've been through it. I've been operated on; the heart has been cut out. That's made a difference. I'm not the girl you fell in love with years ago."

"I know," he answered gravely. "I never loved the girl as I love the woman, Iris."

She sighed, and looked thoughtfully into the boughs of the trees above them, all young green with the softness of the summer breeze playing through them. What could she do in face of his persistence?

"You've got your own life," she said presently, reverting to that vague yet fixed idea she held as to his duty to himself, to the place he was making for himself. To throw up everything now, just when he was making good progress, seemed wasteful.

"I'm thinking of my own life in thus urging you. I'm afraid I'm thinking of it above and beyond your reluctance," he returned.

"No," she contradicted; "you are overlooking your own interests. I've spoilt my life. I've played with it and spoilt it. That's a truth many of us overlook; life's serious; we can't play about with it without effecting its hurt."

"You can pull things straight for yourself," he said.

"By pulling them crooked for you! I wonder?"

"Look here, dear," he said, and possessed himself

of her hands and pulled her nearer. "You live too much in the past; that's neither wise nor right. You want to break away completely. I'm prepared for that. I'd like it. We'd make straight for a new country—a young country—Africa. We'd try farming. Start all over again. It would be like being born again. Jolly! Make you feel good. Come now! Isn't that inspiring?"

She laughed and gave his hand a little squeeze and blushed.

"And your profession—which you love? You've got your job in life; you're doing well at it. Everyone says you will go far. You can't give up your job. I wouldn't let you. It would be sheer waste."

"I'd give all that up for you, dear. Nothing of that matters. What is it compared with my need of you?" he said.

"That's how you feel about it now," she answered, with the wisdom of life behind her words and smile. "But love wanes. All the world of lovers knows that. And there's something finer too than love—effort; the struggle to win up; the making of a place in the world; making one's self felt. The game of life, which anyone who is worth anything has to play up to his full strength."

"Talk, all talk!" he said. "There is nothing but this dear earth which we love, and one heart in all the world for each of us. Given these a man is rich beyond all dreams; denied these his life is not a success and never could be."

"You'll make a success of yours," she persisted.



"Without you, no," he returned.

He dropped her hands abruptly and stood up, and the little boat rocked dangerously under him till he resumed his seat and took hold of the sculls again.

"Well, I suppose I shall go on besieging you until one of us dies," he remarked, and paddled the boat into midstream.

Iris, watching the water run down the blades of the oars and fall in shining drops back into the river, answered without looking into the serious face of her companion :

"Or until I grow old and wrinkled."

"My dear, you will never be anything but your beautiful self to me," he replied.

Following which there was a long silence charged with the mute eloquence of unspoken things.

They returned to the house together later, in time for tea on the terrace, in so amicable and companionable a mood that Mona was deceived into believing that Mark had won his cause. She made significant gestures to him, which he ignored. He knew that she was only waiting for an opportunity to put her inevitable question. And he could not resent her curiosity, because she was so whole-heartedly on his side. He wondered if it would not have served him better had her championship been less assertive.

"Come along, you two, and have tea," she cried. "If there's anything left for you to eat. We've finished hours ago. Someone was suggesting dragging the river."

"He must be hard up for something to do," Renshaw retorted. He smiled at Iris. "All this anxiety



is flattering; it proves at least that we have been missed."

"No one's missed you, old man; it was Iris we were anxious about," Anstruther interposed. "A few lawyers more or less don't signify. Mark takes himself too seriously," he observed to Iris, as he handed her teacup to her and placed a cakestand within her reach. "If you want a happy hour on the river you should let me take you."

He sat down beside her. Renshaw, standing near the tea-table at which Mona presided, took his teacup from her hand and met her look of inquiry with one of mute appeal. The appeal, as he felt it would be, was thrown away on Mona.

"Mark, I'm quite too curious to wait," she murmured. "Of course it's all right? I felt that the moment I saw your face. I'm most terribly pleased."

"There is a time and a place for everything," he returned, stirring his tea, with a speculative eye on the company which was not at the moment evincing any interest in his affairs. "I'd rather not be condoled with in public."

Mona glanced up at him with exaggerated consternation in her look.

"You are not going to tell me. . . ." Her voice trailed off in inarticulate murmuring.

He added a lump of sugar to his tea and continued to stir it meditatively. He smiled at her obvious disappointment.

"But your *face*," she said. "You looked positively *possessive*."

“ Don’t hold me responsible for the disingenuousness of my features,” he begged. “ You wouldn’t have me wear defeat openly ? ”

“ Mark, I’m *desolated* ! I did think you’d bring it off this time,” she said.

“ That was my intention,” he admitted. “ I’ve done my best.”

“ You are not giving in ? ” she asked quickly.

“ Oh lord, no ! ”

The quiet assurance of his voice convinced her of his earnestness. She liked that in him, that steadfastness of purpose. He never made a fuss, and he never gave in. She turned her gaze in the direction of Iris, eating cake and laughing at the sallies of her husband and another male member of the party. They made quite a gay grouping. What struck Mona particularly when her gaze fell upon Iris at a moment when she happened to be laughing was that her beauty was not so much reappearing after its period of pallid eclipse, as developing in a new and surprising and altogether attractive way. She was wonderfully improved ; softened and more womanly.

Thinking thus, she looked back at Renshaw to discover that he too was observing the subject of her interest with particular concentration. He was still stirring his tea mechanically—he seemed to have forgotten that it was there for the purpose of drinking—and looking at Iris with an intentness of which he was unaware. Mona’s voice recaptured his attention.

“ If you aren’t successful in one sense, I think you

are succeeding in another. Iris is a different woman, these days. She is immensely improved."

"I don't think I can comfort myself with the belief that the improvement has anything to do with me," he returned. "There have been many influences at work in her life of late. She responds to these."

"But they are bad influences," she argued.

"Not all of them. Unhappy, perhaps. But any influence, no matter what its source, is better in its effect on us than just rusting in an agreeable complacency."

"In that case there is no need to condole with you," she observed with fine irony.

"Assuredly not," he replied. "Disappointment is like a death in a family; however deep the sorrow, no matter how irreparable the loss, with time one acquiesces in it and adapts one's self to circumstances."

"And you expect me to believe that you are in love!" she scoffed.

"I am in love all right. Only I realize that I am crying for the moon."

### XLIII

WHILE Iris was enjoying the summer days at Greenway, Nigel was cursing his fate in London, where he was stranded, bereft pretty well of everything and altogether out of conceit with life.

He felt quite unjustly ill used. He blamed everyone for his unhappy condition, and ended by calling himself a fool, which was the nearest he got to the truth of things.

His romance was over ; a thing not worn actually threadbare but violently disrupted. It had started as romance and ended in sordid financial complications. He had never been rich enough to hold the affections of his too popular conquest indefinitely ; the fact that the thing had lasted as long as it had done was proof of the genuineness of the affection which had first attracted this girl, who had broken up his home, and now turned him down in favour of a wealthy admirer who had taken her for a voyage in his yacht.

Nigel cursed, not the man who had relieved him, not the girl who had ruined his home, but his lack of sufficient funds to compete successfully in the financial market where love was bartered. He felt that he ought to have been able to hold what he had won, that it was monstrous he should be outbid. He felt that his pocket had let him down. Life was beating

him all round through his pocket. Money vanished like air. It never seemed to him, that he had, that he could have, enough ; his wants outpaced his income always.

And the girl had fleeced him. Like himself, she had been extravagant ; her greed was insatiable. And now she was gone out of his life finally. It was not so much regret he felt ; he was stung to resentment by her desertion. She had thrown him over remorselessly and rather meanly. And now she was enjoying her summer, and he was left stranded in London, with no friends left, only a few more or less vulgar acquaintances with whom he had come in contact through his association with her.

He was too hard up to take a holiday. He found himself thinking regretfully of the pleasant little trips he had enjoyed with Iris in the car ; the happy holidays together in the country. She had made a jolly companion on a holiday.

He wondered how she was getting on, if she missed him at all, if her anger against him had died down during these long months of separation ? He was amazed when he reflected on the matter to discover how many months intervened between the remorseful present and that time of sharp dissension when he had walked out of the flat with no intention of ever returning.

He had the key of the flat still in his possession. Odd ! Why had he kept the key since he was resolved he would not go back there ? He had forgotten that he had it, he supposed.

His reflections led him from one point to another,

till he arrived at the question of whether it would be possible to retrace his steps and begin again? Whether Iris would receive him if he went back? Whether she would forgive him—take him back? He could find no answer to that.

He was not over-confident as to her forgiveness. She had been more righteously, unforgiveably angry than he had ever seen her before, or believed possible with her amiable disposition.

He put the thought of going back behind him as unthinkable. He couldn't put himself in so humiliating a position—to go back, a suppliant for forgiveness—to be perhaps turned away, like an undeserving beggar who solicits alms. If he was sure she would receive him. . . . No; he could not face her; he could not risk a refusal; it would be altogether too humiliating.

But he kept the key of the flat nevertheless, and even carried it about with him in his pocket. It acted like some charm which drew his thoughts towards the past, towards his happy life with Iris, and those good days following their marriage before disaster overtook them and separation and the subsequent fret and jar of misunderstanding. It had been a good life. It was mainly his fault that it was not a good life still.

Thus he thought of her continually, of their home life together, till his scruples became exhausted and he resolved to seek her out. He thought first of writing; and in fact began a letter to her which was never finished. He could not express himself on paper; he did not know what to say. Writing was too difficult; he gave it up.



And then one night he saw her outside a theatre. She came out with Renshaw and they got into a taxi and were driven away. Summer was waning, but the tan of summer still coloured her face, in which the glow of renewed health showed. He considered that she looked wonderfully well.

It seemed to him that she smiled upon him kindly as the taxi drove away; she had turned her face in his direction and smiled, he believed, in recognition. But in that he was mistaken. She had not seen him; her smile was in response to something which her companion said.

Nigel turned away with a feeling of fierce indignation against Renshaw. So Mark was taking advantage of his being out of the picture! He was hanging round after her like a hungry wolf. He would have scorned the suggestion that he was jealous of Renshaw; but he felt fierce none the less when he saw her with him.

He did not sleep that night for thinking of her. The glimpse he had had of her stirred memories. And she had looked well. She was not apparently grieving over his absence. Still, she had smiled upon him with a sort of sweet graciousness, a slow wistful smile which had made him believe she wanted to speak to him—only she hadn't spoken; the taxi had moved on and borne her away from him. But the memory of her smile lingered.

The result of that encounter was an irresistible desire to talk with her. He wanted more than anything to end their estrangement. It ceased to be a matter of importance whether the interview proved



humiliating to himself ; in any event it was bound to be that. He was prepared to swallow his pride and admit his error. He had been in the wrong—from the start. He had let her down. And she had always been a staunch and loyal chum to him. So staunch and loyal had she been in the past that he believed she would be the same now. She would make allowance for him. Surely she would forgive him. He could not conceive it possible that she would withhold forgiveness.

So he argued in his thoughts with a view to heartening himself for the coming interview.

He went by tube to Lancaster Gate, and leaving the station, walked the short distance to the block of flats where his wife lived, and entered the lift and was shot upward by an interested and frankly curious porter, who had taken his baggage down for him and seemed surprised to see him again.

When he got out and stood before the door of the flat he felt decidedly nervous. He fumbled in his pocket for the key. At first he could not find it and began to think he must have left it behind. If he had left it behind he would have turned about and gone down again by the staircase. He could not have brought himself to ring the bell. But the key was there all right, in another pocket.

He inserted it in the lock. It surprised him to see how his hand shook in doing this. It turned and the door slid open and showed the dimly lighted passage with the familiar cream walls and the oak rack for hats, with the table beneath it, on which stood gener-

ally a bowl of flowers. There was a bowl of flowers on it now, long spikes of blue flowers with which he was familiar though he did not know their name.

He stood for a moment irresolutely ; then bracing himself with an effort he walked towards the sitting-room, and paused again outside the door, with his hand on the knob, too nervous it seemed to make up his mind to enter.

And inside the room Iris sat like a woman petrified, waiting for the door to open, waiting and wondering.

She had heard the key turn in the lock. The sound so oddly intimate, had startled her. She knew it must be her husband. No one else had a key to her flat. Nigel had taken the key away with him. And now he was come back—after all this time. Why ?

She heard his hand on the door, saw the handle move ; and still he did not enter. She sat staring at the door. Why didn't he come in ? She felt she wanted to scream. Why had he come back ? Why, since he had come, did he stand outside hesitating ? That slow clumsy fumbling at the door-handle frightened her. She stood up suddenly. Suppose it was not Nigel ? Suppose it was someone else, someone with sinister motives ?

" Who is it ? " she called out, and went a step forward.

The door opened slowly. Nigel came into the room and shut the door behind him and remained standing with his back to it.

" You ! " she said.

" Me," he answered. " Iris, I have come home."

## XLIV

“ I HAVE come home,” Nigel repeated.

He stood confronting her, looking towards her inquiringly. Her reception of him was not encouraging. Somehow he had believed she would welcome him kindly. He remembered her look and the smile in her eyes, when they had rested momentarily—or had appeared to rest—on him outside the theatre. Her look and her smile had seemed to him to promise more than she now offered. Any doubt that she had consciously looked, or deliberately smiled at him while seated in the taxi beside Renshaw, did not present itself to his mind. He believed she had caught his eye. And now he was puzzled to account for her coldness, which was more than coldness and amounted almost to hostility.

She remained quite still, returning his inquiring look with an expression suggestive of dislike, of repulsion even. It was repulsion he inspired in her. She realized while she stood gazing upon him with wide unwelcoming eyes, taking in with bewildered rapidity the sharp unaccountable changes which the months since she had last seen him had worked in him, that he had coarsened, had deteriorated generally. His air was a mixture of furtiveness and defiance. There was a sort of shifty boldness in the eyes which rested

upon her face with such uncertain questioning. Their look called up in her a swift antagonism. She felt herself hardening. All that was kind and generous in her nature seemed to dry up like a spring in a season of drought, leaving the soil it has watered impoverished.

"Why have you come?" she asked.

"Iris," he said. He approached nearer to her, and she drew back with an instinctive dread that he might touch her. "I've been a fool," he said. "I'm sorry. I've come back to ask your forgiveness."

"Why?" she demanded sharply.

"Why!" He stared at her. His new-found humility began to give place to the old imperious revulsion from interference or questioning. "I'm telling you. I'm through with that miserable affair; it's definitely at an end. It was an obsession. It's finished."

"And so you come back to me?" she said. Her voice and her face were bitter. "You feel you have a right to go off on these excursions and come back when it pleases you. You don't consider my feelings."

"I know," he said. "I've blundered badly. But I am considering your feelings. I'm prepared to do whatever you wish. Iris, I came back to crave your forgiveness. I've wanted to come back. I've thought of you and wanted you all the summer. Only I was ashamed."

He was watching her closely. He had hoped to move her with his pleading, and he saw that she was not moved. The Iris he had married would have wept upon his breast; this new Iris, the injured wife, gave

no sign of weeping. She continued to scrutinize him with a cold inquiring intensity which showed no relenting and no kindness.

"I do not want the dregs of your love, which is all that is left. I have no use for that," she said. "It would have been better if you had remained away."

He was perplexed and disconcerted beyond measure. This was not what he had anticipated. Strange though it might appear, he had believed that she would be glad to have him back. A first doubt of her love for him seized him. He had always believed that she loved him with very deep passion; now he began to think he must have been mistaken. She was evidently not only prepared, but was quite satisfied to get along without him. A suspicion that Renshaw was responsible for the alienation of her affections occurred to him. He became quite unreasonably and ungovernably jealous.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "If anyone has come between us he had better look out."

"Don't make matters worse by insulting me," she said coldly.

He was about to retort when he stopped short and stared at her curiously.

"You're hard," he said, in the tone of a man making a discovery. "You've grown hard."

"If I have, is it surprising?" she rejoined.

"You are suggesting that I have made you hard," he retorted. "But that isn't so. It's in you. You're your father's daughter. It was bound to come out."

"Why do you mention my father—to-day?" she asked.

Her question, her manner in putting it even more, puzzled him considerably.

"Hanged if I know," he answered, "why I trouble to mention him at all! He queered life for you and me all right."

"Yes," she said, and turned away from him, and took her stand by a little table on which was a bowl of roses. With an air of preoccupation she touched the blooms, rearranging them unnecessarily. His eyes followed jealously the movements of her hands.

"I suppose Mark sends those?"

"Yes." She desisted from her occupation and walked to the window and remained with her back to the light looking straight at him with dark, sombre eyes. "I don't wish to appear vindictive, but you provoke me into reminding you that you have no right to say a thing like that to me."

He coloured angrily. Then, controlling himself with an effort, he said:

"I offered you your freedom; you didn't want it—then. If you've changed your mind——"

"I haven't," she said. She looked at him for a grave moment, and asked: "Have you?"

"No," he said shortly.

It was in his mind to add that, if they were not going to live together, if she was resolved always to maintain a separate establishment, they ought to be divorced; but prudence restrained him. That would have meant slamming to the door and locking it and losing the key. And he did not want to do that, despite the cold discouragement of her manner.



The sight of her again, following the temporary separation, her physical nearness, with the feeling of immense distances intervening between them mentally, appealed to him irresistibly. Something of her old power reasserted itself, the power which had dwindled since her imprisonment, with her subsequent depression and ill health. A new admiration for her lit his eye. Her pride, her aloofness, even her seeming dislike, commanded his respect. Had she welcomed him back eagerly, shown a too forgiving spirit, she would have lost him again. But she was not forgiving. She showed him quite clearly that she did not want him ; and he, exasperated and obstinately determined to ignore this unsympathetic attitude, endeavoured to hold on to the illusion that he had a perfect right to return, and having returned, to remain. Who was to prevent him ?

“ What are we going to do about it ? ” he asked presently.

“ Do about what ? ”

He made an awkward movement and changed colour. Her directness was disconcerting.

“ I mean what are you going to do ? If there is to be no legal freedom it would be more seemly for us to live beneath the same roof.”

“ No,” she said. “ I don’t think I could do that. I’m sure I couldn’t.”

“ But look here ! ” he said, holding himself in check though he felt choking with anger. “ What else is there for it ? It makes a scandal, our being apart.”

“ Aren’t you a little late in thinking about that ? ”



she asked. "Besides, scandal has been so busy with our name that this can't affect us greatly. Just one other stigma! I'll tell you why I can't live with you—because I have loved you; and you have spoilt things."

"I want to make amends," he said, his anger dying down before her words. She shook her head.

"To live together again would be like living with a corpse; always that cold dead thing between us. It would drive me mad."

"I'm sorry. I thought you might see your way to patching matters," he said. "You were always generous. I wouldn't have come, only I counted on that. And it's rotten being apart. I've made a muddle of things. It's my own fault. Still——"

He paused, and eyed her for some sign of relenting; but beyond a sudden darkening of her eyes, she betrayed no emotion whatever. His return had surprised and disturbed her. She had not yet recovered from her surprise; but she was sufficiently collected to realize that the last thing she desired was to live with him again with the knowledge that his love for her was dead. And she believed it was dead. *How* could it be otherwise when he could leave her as he had done to indulge a passing fancy?

"All through the summer," he said, "I've wanted to come."

"And you didn't come—until to-day. Did you remember?—this is the anniversary of my father's death?"

"Eh?" he said. He looked nonplussed. What

on earth had that to do with it? "Is it? Yes, of course."

What could he say? It was not a matter for condolence, he decided. He felt awkward under her steadfast scrutiny.

"Three years ago to-day!" she said slowly. "The grass is growing on our graves."

There was a cold finality in the sound of her words which left him with no hope of her relenting. He had been unlucky in his choice of a day, he reflected. He looked at her gloomily and made no response.

## XLV

**I**RIS sat and thought about her husband for long after he had gone, and she was alone once more in the room which had become hateful to her, with its unlovely memories and associations, its air of inadequate and would-be elegance ; the only thing of any real beauty in all its trivial adornment was the bowl of red roses on the table ; these, rich in colour and very fragrant, brightened and sweetened the place. Their scent came to her soothingly, and the sight of them refreshed her jaded nerves. Good old Mark ! The staunch and perfect friend, who refused to relinquish the friendship even though she declined to accept him as a lover. He helped her to hold on to the remnant of her faith in mankind.

The remnant was very fragile she realized that day. Her mood was bitter. She had woke that morning with a prestige of ill ; and the post had brought her a puzzling letter, which had set her thinking back, and filled her mind with vague resentments and curiosities and impatience.

The letter was written by Mr. Grant, her father's solicitor, who proposed later in the day paying her a visit. In doing this he was acting on the instructions of his late client, he explained briefly. He gave her to understand further that the communication he had

to make was of considerable importance, and related to a substantial provision by which she benefited under a separate deed executed by Mr. Chaffery at the time he had made his will, and carrying a proviso which allowed for the contents to be divulged on the third anniversary of his death. That date had fallen due.

Although she was not expecting Mr. Grant before five o'clock that afternoon, she had at first connected Nigel's arrival with his prospective visit. Even now she could not detach her thoughts altogether from that first suspicion of foreknowledge on her husband's side, and a desire to become reconciled with her in advance of the announcement of her fortune. He had gone away, as she had recognized, with the utmost reluctance. He had not flung out of the room in a rage as he had done before; he had gone quietly with an air of remorse, of wanting to say things which he found too difficult to say and so abandoned unspoken. He had accepted her ruling; but he had done so unwillingly. He had worn a look of defeat. That look had appealed to something within her which proved that she was not so hard as he, or she herself, believed. He had relinquished the struggle somewhat abruptly, rather as a man might who has lost heart. She knew that he would never again make any appeal to her clemency. That was finished. He had accepted his defeat.

She felt that it closed a chapter, closed the whole book of her life for that matter; and she was very bitter. All the best of her life, all its sweetness, its youth, its love, he had taken and squandered; and she was left with nothing—but the promise of some

substantial benefit which now could profit her little. This thing came too late. It would have made all the difference in the world if it had come earlier.

She was still brooding over these matters when Mr. Grant arrived and was admitted. He came into the room where she was, carrying the inevitable little bag, looking grave and important, suggesting in his deportment profound responsibilities and confidences entrusted to his safe custody. He wore the air too of one charged with an agreeable mission, which he had every reason to suppose would be well received. So nicely balanced was his sense of pleasurable satisfaction and his graver sense of respect for the dead that, although he smiled upon the daughter of his late client with bright reassurance, the smile was withdrawn immediately in tribute to the solemnity of this anniversary of her father's death. Iris's reception of him, as her reception of his information later, chilled him. She showed no appreciation of the importance of the occasion.

"You received my letter?" he said.

"Yes." She invited him to be seated. "It puzzled me. Am I to understand that my father repented of his injustice to me and left me something after all?"

"Under a separate deed of gift, yes."

Mr. Grant did not like her wording of the question. It was not a well-considered moment for reviving grievances.

"On the occasion of his making his will—which might perhaps be considered somewhat harsh—after I left him he drafted this later document. Subsequently

I was recalled, and it was signed and sealed in my presence, and in the presence of two impartial witnesses. I was privileged to read this deed before sealing it. The contents were very gratifying, with the sole exception of the proviso, which stipulated for a lapse of three years following the testator's death before the contents of this document could be made known to the donee. That clause may sound severe ; but I have no doubt that Mr. Chaffery had quite a sound reason for inserting it."

" Oh ! I understand his reason," Iris returned with bitterness.

" I will, subject to your permission, read the document to you," Mr. Grant intervened hastily. " Then you will have some knowledge of the munificence of the bequest."

He broke the seal, and proceeded forthwith to read the deed, executed in Mr. Chaffery's own handwriting, which, briefly worded, with no legal embroidering, stated that he left to his daughter, Iris, unconditionally and free of duty, the sum of two hundred thousand pounds. The proviso, stipulating for the lapse of three years following his death before the bequest should be divulged, followed ; also a clause to the effect that should his daughter incur any debts, or be otherwise financially embarrassed during the period specified before her inheritance became due, these embarrassments and debts were to be relieved from a fund, specified, which he placed in trust to be administered privately at the discretion of his friend, trustee and executor, Ernest Grant.

At the conclusion of the reading Iris asked two questions, which did not so much occur to her mind as a result of the reading, but were prompted by suspicions formed previously which had strengthened while she listened.

"And you have been drawing from this fund on my behalf?" she said. "I have been puzzled to account for the settlement of my bills."

"Acting under instructions, yes," Mr. Grant replied.

The dry precision of the lawyer's manner irritated Iris. Although she felt this to be unjust, she held him associated somehow with her troubles. He had been always so closely in touch with her father's affairs that it seemed to her as though he were a partner in this conspiracy of silence, which had assisted in wrecking her married happiness. Two hundred thousand pounds might be useful to her certainly, but it could not buy back her lost happiness. And he seemed to expect her to be gratified with the information of this belated inheritance.

"Does my husband know about this?" she asked abruptly.

"My dear Mrs. Hennelly! Most emphatically, no. I alone was aware of the contents of this deed. I should certainly not impart that information to anyone save yourself."

"I wondered," she said, only partially convinced it sounded from her tone.

It was strange that Nigel should return in so penitent a frame of mind on the day of this astonishing windfall. The thought had flashed into her mind at sight of him



that somehow he must have learned about this legacy. Her mind was charged full with suspicion and doubts of this nature, and unjust thoughts. She felt not a little ashamed of this mental attitude, and of the anger and bitterness which made anything like gracious speech, even a gracious silence, impossible. The pent-up bitterness of years overflowed in scathing denunciation of her father's treatment of her husband. Her father was responsible for all their suffering, even for their sins, as she saw it. He had brought her up expensively, uselessly, and had discarded her ruthlessly to face what he knew would be absolute poverty in her inexperience of money, save as an inexhaustible commodity. Now, too late, came wealth.

"I hate his money, and I hate his memory," she said. "He has ruined my life in his cynical desire to show up the weaknesses in my husband's character. How much finer would it have been if, knowing the weaknesses were there, he had helped in covering them. Nigel hasn't been fairly dealt by. If he had been given a chance he would have made good. It wasn't fair—to either of us."

"Dear, dear!" Mr. Grant said, and rustled his papers nervously. "Dear, dear!"

What he had believed was going to prove an agreeable interview had turned out very differently. It sounded like desecration in his ears to hear her speak in this way of the dead.

## XLVI

**I**RIS sat up late that night, writing a letter to her husband. The letter was the outcome of several hours' deep and concentrated thinking. She had resolved, after long wrestling with her pride, upon a line of action which appeared to her by the calm light of reason the best possible course to adopt where every course seemed blocked with hampering considerations. She desired only to steer between these difficulties and avoid further wreckage if possible.

They had wrecked so much, she and Nigel ; it was as though they had deliberately set out to do this ; and yet neither of them, she believed, had begun with any evil intent. They had not started with any fixed purpose in life ; perhaps that was the reason of their failure. One needed an object, an aim, something to make for. They had begun the voyage of married life with no steering apparatus. They had drifted easily where pleasure led them, till they came upon the shoals and sandbanks and stuck there firmly in the mud. That was what had happened to them ; they were stuck in the mud. The one thing left to them was to get their craft clear again and steer a different course.

All the anger and bitterness of her mood had passed, only sorrow's heavily weighted influence pressed upon

her desolatingly. She regretted what she had said to the little lawyer, though she had meant every word of it. She had grieved him quite unnecessarily. Why did one do these stupid, unnecessary things? Why, if one could not be kind, could one not at least remain decently silent? Her life was all blundering—one hopeless blunder from the beginning.

Slowly, as it were, reluctantly, she took up her pen to write, and for a while the pen moved haltingly over the paper in disconnected paragraphs, with many pauses between the writing, pauses given to deliberation and indecision and distressful misgivings, as though the writing of this letter demanded much effort on her part.

“DEAR NIGEL” (she wrote)—

“Since your visit to-day I have been thinking over many things you said, and reconsidering and regretting much of what I said. I was too surprised I think to be altogether just; and I was suffering, as I am still, from a feeling of intolerable injury. I don’t think that is likely to subside. But things have happened \_\_\_\_\_”

She broke off. She had meant to tell him of the legacy, but decided not to do so. That in the circumstances would not be fair to him.

“I am seeing things altogether differently from what I did before. I see that I made a mistake to-day in refusing to agree to a reconciliation. Your idea is the right one. If we do not live together we only

add to the scandal. That would be an evil thing to do.

"We are marked people, streaked people ; there is a strain of viciousness in both of us. It is better that we stick together, and not injure others, as we might do if we lived apart. And so I write this letter to ask you to come back. There is a long life in front of us ; we are both young. I think perhaps we may do better in the future than we have done. Come back to me and let us try again.

" IRIS."

She posted her letter in the box before, wearied out with the strain of the day, she went to bed and fell speedily into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Her first thought on waking in the morning was of the letter she had posted overnight. The irrevocableness of her decision relieved her of further responsibility in the matter. It was useless to speculate upon whether she had acted wisely, whether she would regret the step later ; it was taken ; it remained for her now to discover what response he made.

He would receive the letter by the second post, she believed. What would he do ? Would he answer it in writing, or would he come ? She could not tell.

As the day wore on an increasing nervousness seized her. She did not go out. Despite a feeling of restlessness and a desire for air, she could not leave the flat. If he came he should find her waiting for him. She had sent forth the olive branch ; she must be there to take it in.

When six o'clock struck a doubt of his coming took possession of her. It moved her very little ; she was beyond feeling any emotion, save that strange new nervousness which she could not shake off.

And then, when she had almost given up expecting him, she heard his key in the lock. She turned swiftly and went out into the passage with her heart beating tumultuously and all the blood rushing away from it, leaving her deadly cold. He opened the door very quietly, and seeing her there, stopped short and remained looking at her steadfastly.

"Iris," he said.

She put out a hand and took his hand and led him inside. In her eyes there was a great sadness.

WOOLWICH  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY















